

TO THE READER

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SHAKESPEARE'S
FEMALE CHARACTERS

" O degli altri poeti onore e lume,
Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,
Che m' ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume ! "

—DANTE : *Inferno*, Canto I.

O thou of bards the glory and the light,
Be it not wholly vain, that year on year
With a great love I have explored thy book.

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ON ~~SOME~~ OF

(100)

SHAKESPEARE'S
FEMALE CHARACTERS''

Handel
M. of V. OPHELIA
Othello PORTIA
Romeo DESDEMONA
JULIET

IMOGEN
ROSALIND
BEATRICE
HERMIONE

BY

HELENA FAUCIT, LADY MARTIN

SEVENTH EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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DEDICATED BY PERMISSION

TO

HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY
QUEEN VICTORIA

January 1885.

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L' ENVOI.

WHEN the first of these letters was published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, they were preceded by the following note:—

“These two or three letters were written in the autumn, at the instigation, and for the gratification, of a dear and gifted friend who has since passed away. No thought of their being made public was in my mind, so they naturally ran into many personal details which I knew would make them more interesting to an intimate friend, but which otherwise I should not have thought worth recording. These details, I am told, I could not remove without altering the nature of my slight attempts to illustrate by the pen characters which, with much greater pleasure to myself, I have had to illustrate upon the stage. The few friends who have seen them appear to be of one mind, that my ‘thoughts’ may have an interest for a wider circle; and, indeed, I have been entreated, past all refusing, to give them to the world. But I confess to yielding up my own wish for privacy with great reluctance, all the more because the fear haunts me that I may appear to be dictating,—to say, as it were, ‘This is Shakespeare’s Ophelia’; whereas I only mean this is Ophelia as she has appeared

to my mind—as she has lived and lives for me. I hope this may be understood.”

Miss Geraldine E. Jewsbury, the valued friend here referred to, had often pressed me to put into writing the substance of what I had said when we talked together of Shakespeare's heroines. She had seen me embody most of them upon the stage, and knowing how much of my inner life had gone into these impersonations, it pleased her to think that I might in writing do something to awaken in the minds of others the impressions which had grown up in my own through the reverent study of the best part of my life, and been tested and confirmed by the, to me at least, vital experience of the stage. I shrank from the task, with the natural diffidence of one who not only had never been accustomed to this mode of expression, but who also felt profoundly that no critical analysis or exposition can ever do for the illustration of Shakespeare what may be done by the living presentment of the stage. But my friend, I knew, was dying, and how could I resist her kind assurances that I might do good by yielding to her wish? When I consented, this gave her genuine pleasure; and her pleasure, when she read what I had written, was expressed in words that encouraged me to make it public.

It was indeed a surprise to me to find how warmly the letters on Ophelia, Portia, and Desdemona were received. I was urged to go on, and to extend them to others of Shakespeare's heroines. This I have done, adding to them studies of Juliet, Imogen, Rosalind, Beatrice, and Hermione. I have resisted the temptation to go still further, and to write of Lady Macbeth, Constance of Bretagne, Miranda, Isabella, and Cordelia, all of whom it has been my happy fortune to illustrate on the stage. I studied them all with

the same devotion that I gave to the heroines of whom I have written. Like them, they became living realities for me, and in impersonating them I learned much, which would not otherwise have been learned, as to the master poet's conception and purpose, as all conscientious impersonators of Shakespeare's characters cannot fail to learn. But I fear I have already taxed too greatly the patience of those who have read my studies; and, if there be any value in them, they will suffice to effect the object with which they were written, which was to show that, over and above natural gifts of temperament, of voice, figure, and deportment, there must go to the impersonation of any of Shakespeare's great characters a thorough study of the entire play, as well as of the particular character to be represented, for only by this study can the actor hope to identify himself so completely with that character that its development will become, as it ought to be, as spontaneous and harmonious as the growth of a plant from the germ into a perfect flower.

How it grows thus who may tell? Not the artist himself, at any rate. I have often been asked—indeed, this kind of questioning began when I had been only a few months on the stage—how I did this, how I did that, by what means I produced such and such an effect, how I came to adopt such and such a shade of expression, or make such and such a movement. Questions of this kind irritated me, because they seemed to imply that the actor's art was something wholly mechanical, to which the impulse of the moment was a stranger, and that no part of what it did at its best was to be regarded as the unconscious emanation of one's own very self. To such questions, therefore, I could never reply. How could I reply, when I myself never knew how the result was produced for

which I was asked to account? Of course, I never went upon the stage in any character until I had carefully considered how I might best convey to others the idea I had formed of what the author intended should be made palpable there to "the very faculties of eye and ear." But there is something which no previous study can formulate, something that gives the crowning charm to the actor's impersonation, but of which he is himself at the moment unconscious. When, therefore, such questions were put to me, I could no more answer them than a poet could explain how a noble image or a perfect phrase flashed upon his brain, or a painter say how in painting a face some subtle and suggestive shade of expression found its way into his pigments.

How true are Mr Ruskin's words:—

Art must not be talked about. The fact that there is talk about it at all signifies that it is all done, or cannot be done. No true painter ever speaks, or ever has spoken, much of his art. The greatest speak nothing. . . . The moment a man can really do his work he becomes speechless about it. All words become idle to him, and all theories. Does a bird need to theorise about building its nest, or boast of it when built? All good work is essentially done that way—without hesitation, without difficulty, without boasting; and in the doers of the best there is an inner and involuntary power, which approximates literally to the instinct of an animal—nay, I am certain, that in the most perfect human artists, reason does not supersede instinct, but is added to an instinct as much more divine than that of the lower animals as the human body is more beautiful than theirs; that a great singer sings not with less instinct than the nightingale but with more—only more various, applicable, and governable; that a great architect does not build with less instinct than the beaver or the bee, but with more—with an innate cunning of proportion that embraces all beauty, and a divine ingenuity of skill that improvises all construction. But be that as it may—be the

instinct less or more than that of inferior animals—like or unlike theirs, still the human art is dependent on that first, and then upon an amount of practice, of science, and of imagination disciplined by thought, which the true possessor of it knows to be incommunicable, and the true critic of it inexplicable, except through long process of laborious years. That journey of life's conquest, in which hills on hills, alps on alps arose and sank, do you think you can make another trace it painlessly by talking?¹

What is thus beautifully said I believe to be no less true of the actor's art, in the only right sense of that word, than it is of all other arts. No one who does me the honour to read these studies will gather from them what I did upon the stage, or how I did it, for this is more than I myself could tell. This much, however, they may perhaps learn from them—that if I succeeded there in moving the hearts or raising the imaginations of my audiences, it was because all that I had assimilated from the study of the best literature and of the best art within my reach, all that I had tried in a humble and devout spirit to learn and to practise of what was pure and unselfish, honourable and worthy in thought and in act, together with all that my own heart and experience of life had taught me, was turned to account in the endeavour to present a living picture of womanhood as divined by Shakespeare, and held up by him as an ideal for woman to aspire to, and for men to revere.

Whatever gifts I had as an actress were ever regarded by me as a sacred trust to be used for widening and refining the sympathies of my audiences, by transporting them into a world larger, purer, brighter, grander than that of their everyday life, and for bringing closer to

¹ *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 149, ed. 1871.

their minds and hearts the "nobler thoughts and nobler cares," which are the richest blessing that the poets have brought us. Working in this spirit, I had my reward in the bond of sympathy, often bordering on affection, which grew up between myself and the unknown world of those to whom I spoke. It gave me strength and inspiration to vanquish difficulty and fatigue, and to strive ever to give a fuller truth and completeness to my conceptions. In a thousand ways it was brought home to me that I did good, and therefore I honoured and revered my art as well as loved it. With those who, having practised it in its higher walks, and practised it with success, have spoken of it with disparagement, I have no sympathy. I should indeed be ungrateful were it otherwise. I look back upon my life with profound thankfulness, that I was able by the practice of my art, while keeping alive within myself all that in my earliest dreams I had imagined of what was fairest, and best, and highest in thought and character, to awaken a kindred feeling in those to whom it was my privilege to give a living interpretation to the conceptions of the highest dramatic genius.¹

H. F. M.

¹ When the fifth edition of this book was called for in 1893 the above Preface was written but discarded. It contains, however, so full an expression of the authoress's views of her art, and of the spirit in which she worked in it, that it seems not unworthy of being preserved.

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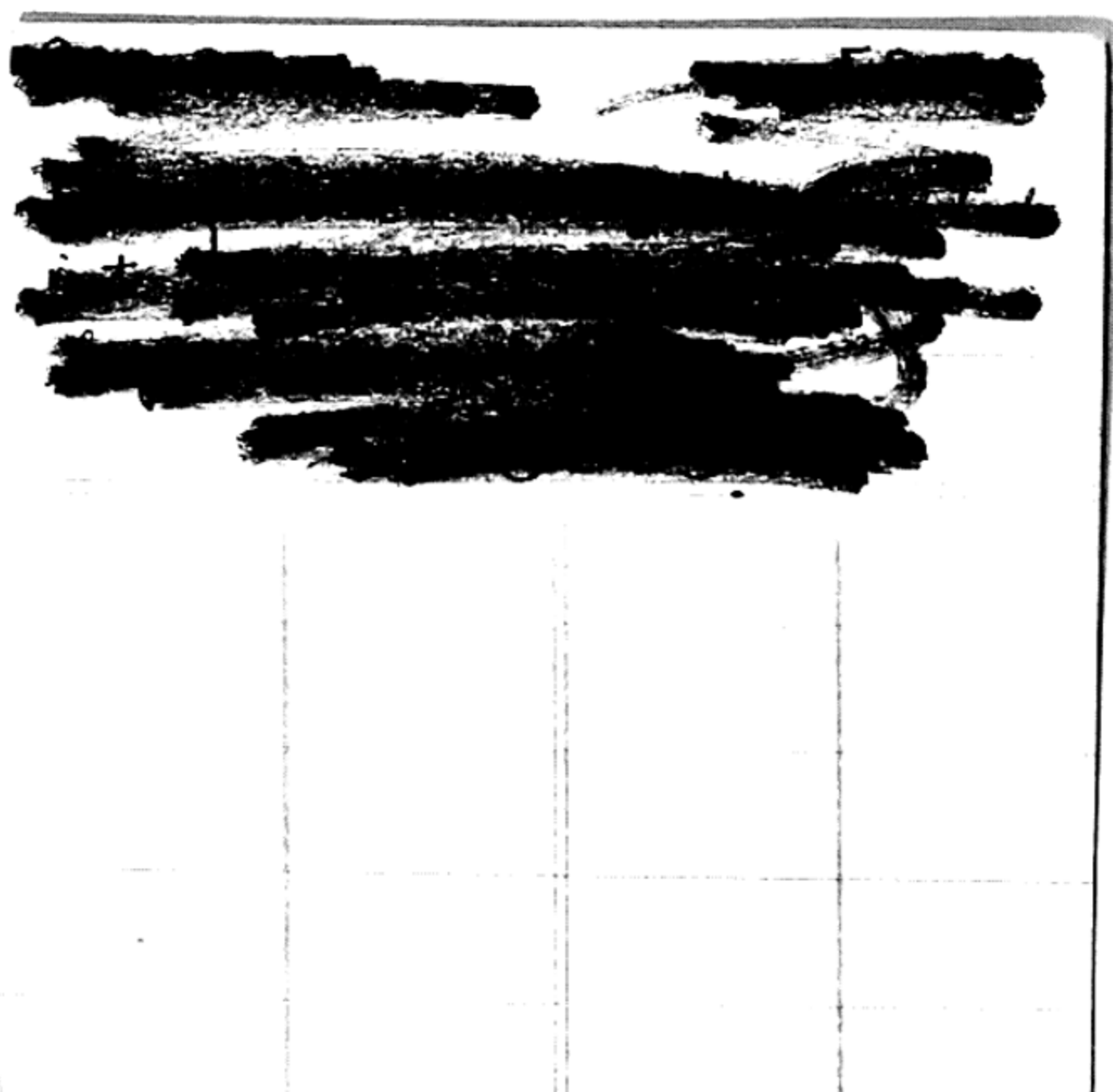
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I.

O P H E L I A



I.

O P H E L I A.

BRYNTYSILIO, *August 10, 1880.*

“O rose of May ! Sweet Ophelia !”

AND so you ask me, my friend—indeed, I may almost say that you insist—after our late talk over her, that I should put down in writing my idea of Ophelia, so that you may make, as you tell me, a new study of her character.

You are accustomed to write fluently all your thoughts, and therefore you will hardly believe what a difficult task you have set me. My views of Shakespeare's women have been wont to take their shape in the living portraiture of the stage, and not in words. I have, in imagination, lived their lives from the very beginning to the end ; and Ophelia, as I have pictured her to myself, is so unlike what I hear and read about her, and have seen represented on the stage, that I can scarcely hope to make any one think of her as I do. It hurts me to hear her spoken of, as she often is, as a weak creature, wanting in truthfulness, in purpose, in force of character, and only interesting when she loses the little wits she had. And yet who can wonder that a character so delicately outlined, and shaded in with touches so fine, should be often gravely misunderstood ?

Faint and delicate, however, as these shadowings are, they are yet so true to nature, and at the same time so full of suggestion, that I look on Ophelia as one of the strongest proofs our great master has left us of his belief in the actor's art (his own), and of his trust in the power possessed, at least by sympathetic natures, of filling up his outlines, and giving full and vivid life to the creatures of his brain. Without this belief could he have written as he did, when boys and beardless youths were the only representatives of his women on the stage? Yes, he must have looked beyond "the ignorant present," and known that a time would come when women, true and worthy, should find it a glory to throw the best part of their natures into these ideal types which he has left to testify to his faith in womanhood, and to make them living realities for thousands to whom they would else have been unknown. Think of a boy as Juliet! as "heavenly Rosalind"! as "divine Imogen"! or the gracious lady of Belmont, "richly left," but still more richly endowed by nature—"The poor rude world," says Jessica, "hath not her fellow." Think of a boy as Miranda, Cordelia, Hermione, Desdemona—who "was heavenly true"—as the bright Beatrice, and so on, through all the wondrous gallery! How could any youth, however gifted and specially trained, even faintly suggest these fair and noble women to an audience? Women's words, women's thoughts, coming from a man's lips, a man's heart—it is monstrous to think of! One quite pities Shakespeare, who had to put up with seeing his brightest creations thus marred, misrepresented, spoiled.

Ophelia was one of the pet dreams of my girlhood—partly, perhaps, from the mystery of her madness. In my childhood I was much alone—taken early away from school because of delicate health; often sent to spend months at the seaside, in the charge of kind but busy people, who, finding me happy with my books on the beach, left me there long hours by myself. I had begged from home the Shakespeare I had been used to read there—an acting edition by John Kemble. This and the *Arabian Nights*—how dear these books were to me! Then I had the *Pilgrim's Progress* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Satan was my great hero. I think I knew him by heart. His

address to the council I have often declaimed to the waves, when sure of being unobserved. I had also a translation—I do not know by whom (poor enough, but good enough for me then)—of Dante's *Inferno*, some lines of which sank deep into my heart. I have not seen the book for years; but they are still there:—

“Up! be bold!
Vanquish fatigue by energy of mind!
For not on plumes, or canopied in state,
The soul wins fame!”¹

How often since, in life's hard struggles and trials, have these lines helped me!

My books were indeed a strange medley, but they were all that were within my reach, and I found them satisfying. They filled my young heart and mind with what fascinated me most—the gorgeous, the wonderful, the grand, the heroic, the self-denying, the self-devoting.

Like all children, I kept, as a rule, my greatest delight to myself. I remember on some occasions, after I had returned home to my usual studies, when a doubt arose about some passage which had happened to be in the little storehouse of my memory, being able to repeat whole chapters and scenes of my favourites to the amused ears of those around me. But I never revealed how much my life was wrapped up in them, even

¹ I have lately found among my old school-books this little volume, which first introduced me to Dante. It is entitled, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri, translated into English Blank Verse with Notes by Nathaniel Howard. London: 1807.* The passage referred to in the text occurs in canto xxiv. (lines 46 to 54 of the original). It is scored in pencil on the margin with an emphasis, which shows how much it had impressed me. My memory deceived me as to the sequence of the lines, which are as follows:—

“‘Up,’ cried the sage, ‘now needs thy arduous strength,
For not on plumes, or canopied in state,
The soul wins fame, without whose vital smile
Whoe’er consumes away his gift of life,
Expires, and leaves such vestige of himself
As smoke in air, or unregarded foam
Quick-dying in the water. Up! be bold!
Vanquish fatigue by energy of mind,
That conquers every struggle, if uncrushed
Beneath the burden of the body’s frame.’”

to my only sister, dear as she was to me. She was many years older than myself, and too fond of fun to share in my day-and-night dreams. I knew I should only be laughed at.

Thus I had lived again and again through the whole childhood and lives of many of Shakespeare's heroines, long before it was my happy privilege to impersonate and make them, in my fashion, my own. During the few years I acted under Mr Macready's management, almost the first, as you know, in my theatrical life, I was never called upon to act the character of Ophelia—I suppose, because the little snatches of song (though merely, one might say, the humming of a tune) kept still alive the tradition that an accomplished singer was required for the part. I had my wish, however, when in Paris, a little later, I was asked, as a favour, to support Mr Macready in *Hamlet* by acting Ophelia. I need not say how nervous I felt—all the more because of this *singing* tradition. The performances were given in the Salle Ventadour, on the "off-nights" of the Italian Opera.

Oh how difficult it is, however much you have lived in a thing, to make real your own ideal, and give it an utterance and a form! To add to my fright, I was told, just before entering on the scene, that Grisi and many others of the Italian group were sitting in a private box on the stage. But I believe I sang in tune, and I know I soon forgot Grisi and all else. I could not help feeling that I somehow drew my audience with me. And what an audience it was! No obtrusive noisy applause, for there was no organised *claque* for the English plays; but what an indescribable atmosphere of sympathy surrounded you! Every tone was heard, every look was watched, felt, appreciated. I seemed lifted into "an ampler ether, a diviner air." Think, if this were so in Desdemona, in Ophelia, what it must have been to act Juliet to them! I was in a perfect ecstasy of delight. I remember that, because of the curtailment of some of the scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* (the brilliant Mercutio was cut out), I had to change my dress very quickly, and came to the side scene breathless. I said something to Mr Serle, the acting manager, about the hot haste of it all—no pause to gather oneself up for the great exertion that was to follow. He replied, "Never

mind, you will feel no fatigue after this." And he was right. The inspiration of the scene is at all times the best anodyne for pain and bodily fatigue. But who could think of either before an audience so sensitively alive to every touch of the artist's hand?

But to return to "sweet Ophelia." I learned afterwards that, among the audience, when I first attempted the part, were many of the finest minds in Paris; and some of these found "most pretty things" to say of the Ophelia to which I had introduced them. Many came after the play to my dressing-room, in the French fashion, among them Georges Sand—to say them, I suppose; but, having had this ordeal to go through before, after acting Desdemona, the character in which I first appeared in Paris, my English shyness took me out of the theatre as soon as I had finished, and before the play ended. All this was, of course, pleasant. But what really gratified me most was, to learn that Mr Macready, sternest of critics, watched me on each night in the scenes of the fourth act; and among the kind things he said, I cannot forget his telling me that I had thrown a new light on the part, and that he had never seen the mad scenes even approached before. How I treated them, it would be difficult to describe to you in words, because they were the outcome of the whole character and life of Ophelia, as these had shaped themselves in my youthful dream.

And now to tell you, as nearly as I can, what that dream was.

I pictured Ophelia to myself as the motherless child of an elderly Polonius. His young wife had first given him a son, Laertes, and had died a few years later, after giving birth to the poor little Ophelia. The son takes much after his father, and, his student-life over, seeks his pleasure in the gayer life of France; fond of his little sister in a patronising way, in their rare meetings, but neither understanding nor caring to understand her nature.

The baby Ophelia was left, as I fancy, to the kindly but thoroughly unsympathetic tending of country-folk, who knew little of "inland nurture." Think of her,—sweet, fond, sensitive, tender-hearted, the offspring of a delicate dead mother, tended only by roughly-mannered and uncultured natures! One can see the sweet child, with no playmates of her kind,

wandering by the streams, plucking flowers, making wreaths and coronals, learning the names of all the wild-flowers in glade and dingle, having many favourites, listening with eager ears when amused or lulled to sleep at night by the country songs, whose words (in true country fashion, not too refined) come back again vividly to her memory, with the fitting melodies, as such things strangely but surely do, only when her wits had flown. Thus it is that, when she has been "blasted with ecstasy," all the country customs return to her mind: the manner of burying the dead, the strewing the grave with flowers, "at his head, a grass green turf; at his heels, a stone,"—with all the other country ceremonies. I think it important to keep in view this part of her supposed life, because it puts to flight all the coarse suggestions which unimaginative critics have often made, to explain how Ophelia came to utter snatches of such ballads as never ought to issue from a young and cultured woman's lips.

When we see Ophelia first, this "Rose of May" is just budding; and, indeed, it is as a bud, never as a full flower, that she lived her brief life.

"Et, rose—elle a vécu, ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin."

She was still very young, in her early 'teens, according to what Laertes says, when he last sees her. We can imagine her formal, courtierly father, on one of his rare visits to his country home (ill spared from his loved court duties), noting with surprise his little daughter growing into the promise of a charming womanhood. The tender beauty of this budding rose must be no longer left to blush unseen; this shy, gentle nature must be developed, made into something more worthy of her rank. She must imbibe the court culture, and live in its atmosphere. She must become a court lady; and this hitherto half-forgotten flower must be made to expand, under his own eye and teaching, into the completeness of a full-blown hothouse exotic.

When we first see her, we may fairly suppose that she has been only a few months at court. It has taken off none of the bloom of her beautiful nature. That remains pure and fresh

and simple as she brought it from her country home. One change has taken place, and this a great one. Her heart has been touched, and has found its ideal in the one man about the court who was likely to reach it, both from his rare and attractive qualities, and a certain loneliness in his position not very unlike her own. How could she help feeling flattered—drawn towards this romantic, desolate Hamlet, the observed of all observers, whose “music vows” have been early whispered in her ears? On the other hand, what sweet repose it must have been to the tired, moody scholar, soldier, prince, dissatisfied with the world and all its ways, to open his heart to her, and to hear the shy yet eloquent talk which he would woo from her—to watch the look, manner, and movements of this graceful child of nature—watch, too, her growing wonder at her new surroundings, the court ceremonies, the strange diversities of character, and to note the impressions made upon her by them,—what delight to trace and analyse the workings of this pure, impressionable mind, all the more interesting and wonderful to him because of the contrast she presented to the parent stem! In all this there was for him the subtle charm which the deep, philosophical intellect must ever find in the pure unconscious innocence and wisdom of a guileless heart.

One can see how the tiresome officiousness and the platitudes of Polonius irritate Hamlet beyond endurance. What a contrast the daughter presents to him! Restful, intelligent, unobtrusive, altogether charming, and whom he loves “best, O most best, believe it. . . . Thine evermore, most dear lady, while this machine is to him, Hamlet.” And to Ophelia, how great must have been the attraction of an intercourse with a mind like Hamlet’s, when first she saw him, and had been sought by his “solicitations”! How alluring, how subtly sweet to one hitherto so lonely, so tender-hearted, shy, and diffident of her power to please; yet, though she knew it not, so well fitted to understand and to appreciate all the finest qualities of the young Lord Hamlet! We see how often and often they had met, by Polonius’s own telling. Nor could he possibly have been ignorant that they did so meet. He says—

“But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the wing,
(As I perceived it, I must tell you that,
Before my daughter told me).”

Then, all that her brother says to her shows complete indifference to her feelings. I never could get over the shock of his lecturing her “touching the lord Hamlet,” when we first see them together as he is starting for France. Poor maiden! to have this treasured secret of her inner life, her very life, her very soul, a secret so sweet, so sacred, so covered over, as she thinks, from all eyes—thus dragged rudely to the light; discussed in the most commonplace tone, and her very maidenly modesty questioned! Who will say she is not truthful, when, on being asked, as she is soon after, by her father, “What is’t, Ophelia, he hath said to you?” she replies at once, notwithstanding all her pain, “So please you, something touching the lord Hamlet”? Think how her whole nature must again have shrunk and quivered, while listening to the cautious and worldly platitudes of her father, which follow! Then, to be commanded to deny herself to the one being dear to her, and with whom she had sympathy: what a feeling of degradation as well as anguish must have been behind the few words she utters! “I shall obey, my lord.”

Ophelia naturally had her attendants, whose duty it was to tell her father of these meetings, and who evidently did so. They were clearly not objected to by him, and he let the interviews go on, till he thought it might be as well, by interfering, to find out if Hamlet were in earnest in his attachment, and if it would be sanctioned by the king and queen. By this interference his worldly wisdom overreached itself. It came at the wrong, the worst time. He bids Ophelia deny Hamlet access to her, trusting that this will make the Prince openly avow his love; and was, of course, in entire ignorance of the fearful scene, the dread revelation, which had meanwhile taken place, and which was destined to cut Hamlet’s life in twain, obliterate from it all “trivial fond records,” and shake to its foundations all faith in womanhood, hitherto most sacred to him in the name and person of his mother, the mother whom from his boy-

hood he had fondly loved, and whom he had seen so cherished and adored by his dead father.

Pause a moment with me, and think of the extraordinary attractions of this mother. Another Helen of Troy she seems to me, in the wonderful fascination which she exercises on all who come within her influence; not perhaps designedly, but, like the Helena of the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, by an untoward fate which drew on all insensibly to love her:—

“Wehe mir! Welch streng Geschick
Verfolgt mich, überall der Männer Busen
So zu bethören, dass sie weder sich
Noch sonst ein Würdiges verschonten.”

“Woe's me, what ruthless fate
Pursues me, that, where'er I go, I thus
Befool men's senses, so they not respect
Themselves, nor aught that's worthy!”

What a picture is presented of the depth of her husband's love, in Hamlet's words that he would not “beteem the winds of heaven visit her cheek too roughly”! And this spell still exercises itself upon his spirit after his death. Observe how tenderly he calls Hamlet's attention to the queen in the closet scene:—

“But look, amazement on thy mother sits!
Oh, step between her and her fighting soul!”

Claudius, his successor, perils his very soul for her. See what he says of her:—

“She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere
I could not but by her.”

She is tenderness itself to her son. “The queen his mother,” says Claudius, “lives almost by his looks.”

I cannot believe that Gertrude knew of the murder of her husband. His spirit does not even hint that she was privy to it; if she had been, could he have spoken of her so tenderly as he does? Hamlet, in the height of his passion, does indeed charge her with this guilty knowledge in the words—

“Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.”

Again, he calls Claudius in her hearing "a murderer and a villain"; but in both cases the imputation clearly wakens no echo in her soul, and she puts it down, with much else that he says, to "the heat and flame of his distemper." "The black and grained spots" in her soul, of which she speaks, are the stings of her awakened conscience, to which her husband's spirit had warned Hamlet to leave her—remorse for her too speedy forgetfulness of her noble husband, and almost immediate marriage with his brother, towards whom she must have previously shown some preference, the shame of which Hamlet's passionate words have brought home to her so unexpectedly and so irresistibly.

Gertrude evidently sees with satisfaction the growing love between Hamlet and Ophelia. She loves the "sweet maid," and hopes to see their betrothal, and to strew her bridal bed. On her side, Ophelia has felt fully the gracious kindness of the queen; has gratefully returned the affection shown to her; and, like the rest, has been drawn closely towards her by her beauty and winning graciousness. A proof of this attachment breaks out in her madness, when she clamours for, and will not be denied, the presence of "the beauteous majesty of Denmark."

Ophelia's conduct in reference to the meeting with Hamlet, concerted by her father and the king, has drawn upon her head a world of, I think, most unjust censure and indignation. When the poor girl is brought, half willingly, half unwillingly, to that (for her) fatal interview, we must not forget the previous one, described by her to her father, when she rushes in affrighted, and recounts Hamlet's sudden and forbidden intrusion upon her in her closet, where she was sewing; exhibiting a garb and plight in which no sane gentleman would venture to approach a lady—slovenly, "his stockings foul'd, ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle," the woe-worn look, the sigh so piteous and profound, the eyes, as he went backward out of the chamber, bending to the last their light upon herself. Her father's interpretation is, that "he is mad for her love"; and he assigns as the cause for this outbreak, that she "did repel his letters, and denied his access." Here his worldly wisdom is again at fault.

“I am sorry that with better heed and judgment
I had not quoted him : I feared he did but trifle,
And meant to wreck thee.”

All this is startling and sad enough, but not entirely hopeless or remediless. Ophelia has, at least, the solace of hoping, believing, that she is beloved by her “soul’s idol.” Could she, then, but see him once again, she might learn whether Hamlet’s strange agitation were really what was represented,—whether, as her father had said, he were indeed “mad for her love” ! In this state of mind, surely she is not to be much blamed, or judged very harshly, if she consented to lend herself to the arrangement proposed by her father ; acutely painful though it must have been to her sensitive nature, after denying him access to her repeatedly, thus seemingly to thrust herself upon her lover’s notice, and become, as it were, the partner in a trick. She has, also, the sanction of his mother, the queen, who says :—

“And, for your part, Ophelia, I do wish,
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet’s wildness ; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours.”

Her fault, if fault it were, was cruelly expiated. She will test his affection by offering to return his love-tokens, his gifts and letters—anything to end this torturing suspense. We can believe how cautiously, how tenderly her approaches are made to her so deeply loved, and, as she fears, so sadly afflicted Prince. That Ophelia should, after repeatedly denying her presence to him, thus place herself in his path, and challenge his notice, at once excites in Hamlet’s mind a suspicion of some device to circumvent him. Saluting her at first gently, his tone alters, as he sees in the offer of the return of his “remembrances” a repetition, he believes, of the plot laid for him before in the persons of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That he is again to be thus played with, and that this innocent girl, as he had thought her, should lend herself to entrap him, drives him past his patience ; and without mercy he begins to pour down upon her the full vials of his wrath. In their last interview he has been touchingly gentle and sad : voiceless—showing a pathos beyond words : like

the reluctant parting of the soul from the body. Now, his rude, meaningless words, his violent manner, his shrill voice, "out of tune and harsh," the absence of all courtesy, convince her that he is mad indeed.

How can it be otherwise? In all their former intercourse he had appeared to her as

"The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers!"

His gifts were offered to her with "words of so sweet breath composed as made the things more rich." Now he could not be more pitiless if the worst of her sex stood before him, and not this young creature, this tender willow, swaying, bending before the storm-bursts of his wrath, the cutting winds of his fierce words. Many of these words, these reproaches, must have passed harmless over the innocent head which did not know their meaning.¹ But what a picture (who could paint it?) is that of the stunned, bewildered, heart-stricken lamb, thus standing alone to hear the sins of all her sex thrown at her! She can only whisper a prayer or two for him—no thought of her own desolation comes to her. "Oh, help him, you sweet Heavens! . . . Oh Heavenly powers, restore him!" When suddenly challenged, "Where's your father?" the question recalls to her remembrance, what she has for the time forgotten in deeper matter, that he is at this very moment acting the degrading part of an eavesdropper. What can she do but stammer out in reply, "At home, my lord"? Shall she expose the old man, when thus called to answer for him, to the insults, the violence of Hamlet's mad anger, which she fears would have fallen upon his head had she told the truth? No; like Desdemona she faces the falsehood, and, to screen her father, takes it upon her own soul: "Oh, who has done this deed? . . .

¹ "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. . . . To a nunnery, go!"

Nobody ; I myself. Farewell ; commend me to my kind lord." Who thinks of condemning Desdemona ? As Emilia says, " Oh, she was heavenly true." And yet I have seen Ophelia's answer brought forward as a proof of her weakness of character ; and this weakness asserted to be the cause of Hamlet's failure, or, at least, to play an important part in the tragedy of his character. Such weakness I call *strength*, in the highest, most noble, because most self-forgetting, sense of the word.

And so Ophelia, in her " weakness," fears to tell the truth, lest, in this too terrible paroxysm of madness which now possesses him, Hamlet might possibly kill her father. But this catastrophe, alas ! is soon to follow, and proves to be the drop too much in her cup of lonely anguish. When Hamlet has left the scene, even then, I think, no sob is heard, no tears are shed : there is no time yet for self-pity. Her soul's agony is too deep for tears—beyond all utterance of the common kind. First in her thoughts is the " noble mind o'erthrown," and " most sovereign reason, like sweet bells jangled." At last, when she has gone through the catalogue of his rare virtues, his princely qualities, his noble attributes—all " quite, quite down " !—at *the end* she looks at herself—she who had " suck'd the honey of his music vows." What is left for her ?—for her, " of ladies most deject and wretched " ? " Oh, woe is me ! To have seen what I have seen, see what I see ! " This is all she says, " still harping on " Hamlet.

In the usual stage arrangement Ophelia leaves the scene with these words. Shakespeare makes her remain ; and how greatly does this heighten the pathos of her position ! Her heartless father, knowing nothing, seeing nothing of the tragedy that is going on before his eyes, unconscious from first to last how deeply she has been wounded, and still treating her merely as a tool, says—

" How now, Ophelia !
You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said ;
We heard it all."

He and the king had only eyes and ears for Hamlet ; and so she drifts away from them into a shoreless " sea of troubles," unheeded and unmissed.

We see her once again, playing a sort of automaton part in the play-scene—sitting patiently, watchfully, with eyes only for the poor stricken one who asks to lay his head upon her lap. You notice, in the little that passes between them, how gently she treats her wayward, smitten lover. And then, having no clue to his trouble, no thread by which to link it with the past, she is scared away, with the rest, on the poisoning of Gonzago, at what appears to be a fresh outbreak of Hamlet's malady. By this time her own misery and desolation will have come home to her fully—her wounded heart, her wrecked happiness must be more than the young, unaccustomed spirit can stand up against. She is not likely, after her previous experience, to seek solace in her father's sympathy: nor is hers a nature to seek it anywhere. If found, it must come to her by the way. The queen is, by this time, wrapped up in her own griefs—inclined to confess herself to Heaven, repent what's past. "O Hamlet! thou hast cleft my heart in twain. . . . What shall I do?" She is grieved enough for Ophelia when she sees her "distract," but has had no time to waste a thought upon her amid her own numerous fast-growing cares—not even, as it seems, to break to her the news of her father's death. There might have been some drop of comfort, if the queen had spoken to her of Hamlet, and told her, as she told the king, "He weeps for what is done!" As it was, most likely, in the usual marvel-loving way of common people, the news of Polonius's death by Hamlet's hand was conveyed to Ophelia's ears by her attendants hurriedly, without any preparation. Shock upon shock! The heart already stricken, the young brain undisciplined in life's storms, and in close and subtle sympathy with him who was her very life, she catches insensibly the infection of his mind's disease, her wits go wandering after his, and, like him, she falls down—"quite, quite down." One feels the mercifulness of this. The "sweet Heavens," to which she had appealed to help Hamlet, had helped her! Her mind, in losing memory, loses the remembrance of all the woful past, and goes back to her childhood, with its simple folk-lore and nursery-rhymes. Still, through all this, we have the indication of dimly remembered wrongs and griefs. She says she hears "there's tricks i' the

world, and hems, and beats her heart; . . . speaks things in doubt, that carry but half sense: . . . would make one think there might be thought, though nothing sure, yet much unhappily." But the deeper suffering—the love and grief together—cannot (perhaps never could) find expression in words. The soul's wreck, the broken heart, are seen only by Him who knows all. Happily, there is no vulgar comment made upon the deep affection which she had so silently cherished—no commonplace, pitying words. "Oh! this," says the king, "is the poison of deep grief; it springs all from her father's death." Laertes says—

"O rose of May!

O Heavens! is't possible, a young maid's wits
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?"

He comes a little nearer the truth in what follows—

"Nature is fine in love: and, where 'tis fine,
It sends some precious instance of itself
After the thing it loves."

But one sees he has not the faintest insight into the real cause of her loss of wits. The revenge he seeks upon Hamlet is for his father—

"His means of death, his obscure funeral—
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation—
Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call't in question."

A matter of family pride in Laertes, as well as grief for his father's loss. Then at her grave, he says—

"Oh, treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursèd head,
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Deprived thee of!"

Only "when they shall meet at compt" will Hamlet even know the grief he has brought upon, the wrong he has done to, this

deep and guileless spirit. So far as we see, he has indeed blotted her from his mind as a "trivial fond record." He is so self-centred, so enwrapped in his own suffering, that he has no thought to waste on the delicate girl whom he had wooed with such a "fire of love," and had taught to listen to his most honeyed vows. He casts her from him like a worthless weed, without a word of explanation or a quiver of remorse. Let us hope that when he sees her grave, his conscience stings him; but beyond ranting louder than Laertes about what he would do for her sake—and she *dead*!—there is not much sign of his love being at any time worthy of the sweet life lost for it.

Perhaps you will think that, in the fulness of my sympathy for Ophelia, I feel too little for Hamlet. But this is not really so. One cannot judge Hamlet's actions by ordinary rules. He is involved in the meshes of a ruthless destiny, from which by nature and temperament he is powerless to extricate himself. In the infirmity of a character which expends its force in words and shrinks from resolute action, he unconsciously drags down Ophelia with him. They are the victims of the same inexorable fate. I could find much to say in explanation and in extenuation of the shortcomings of one upon whom a task was laid, which he of all men, by the essential elements of his character, was least fitted to accomplish.

But you see I only touch upon his character so far as it bears upon Ophelia, on what he has been to her and what he is. Before the story begins, he has offered her his love "in honourable fashion." Then we hear from her of the silent interview which so affrights her. After this, when for the first time we see them together, he treats her as only a madman could, and in a way which not even his affectation of madness can excuse. Again, in the play-scene which follows, the same wilfulness, even insolence, of manner is shown to her. Now, whatever his own troubles, perplexities, heart-breaks, might be, it is hard to find an apology for such usage of one whose heart he could not but know that he had won. He is even tenderer, more considerate, to his mother, whom he thinks so wanton and so guilty, than to this young girl, whom he has "importuned with love," and "given countenance to his speech with almost all the holy vows of heaven."

I cannot, therefore, think that Hamlet comes out well in his relations with Ophelia. I do not forget what he says at her grave:—

“I loved Ophelia ; forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum !”

But I weigh his actions against his words, and find them here of little worth. The very language of his letter to Ophelia, which Polonius reads to the king and queen, has not the true ring in it. It comes from the head, and not from the heart—it is a string of euphuisms, which almost justifies Laertes’ warning to his sister, that the “trifling of Hamlet’s favour” is but “the perfume and suppliance of a minute.” Hamlet loves, I have always felt, only in a dreamy imaginative way, with a love as deep, perhaps, as can be known by a nature fuller of thought and contemplation than of sympathy and passion. Ophelia does not sway his whole being, perhaps no woman could, as he sways hers. Had she done so, not even the task imposed upon him by his father’s spirit could have made him blot her love from his mind as a “trivial fond record,” for it would have been interwoven inseparably with his soul, once and for ever.

When Ophelia comes before us for the last time, with her lap full of flowers, to pay all honour and reverence, as she thinks, in country fashion, to her father’s grave, the brother is by her side, of whom she had said before, most significantly, that he should “know of it. . . . I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i’ the cold ground.” Then that brother can lavish in her heedless ears the kind phrases, the words of love, of which, perhaps, in her past days he had been too sparing. “O rose of May ! dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia !” But the smiles are gone which would once have greeted these fond words. He has passed out of her memory, even as she had passed out of his, when he was “treading the primrose path of dalliance” in sunny France. She has no thought but to bury the dead—*her dead love*—her old father taking the outward form of it. Even the flowers she has gathered have little beauty or sweetness—“rosemary for remembrance ; pray you, love, re-

member:" the lover has said he never gave her aught! "I loved you not"—"rue," for desolation; fennel, and columbines—a daisy, the only pleasant flower—with pansies for thoughts. Violets she would give, but cannot. "They withered all" with her dead love.

To Ophelia's treatment of her brother in this scene I ventured to give a character which I cannot well describe to you, but which, as I took care it should not be obtrusive, and only as a part of the business of the scene, I felt sure that my great master, the actor-author, would not have objected. I tried to give not only his words, but, by a sympathetic interpretation, his deeper meaning—a meaning to be apprehended only by that sympathy which arises in, and is the imagination of, the heart.

When Laertes approaches Ophelia, something in his voice and look brings back a dim, flitting remembrance; she gives him of her flowers, and motions him to share in the obsequies she is paying. When her eyes next fall upon him, she associates him somehow with the "tricks i' the world." A faint remembrance comes over her of his warning words, of the shock they gave her, and of the misery which came so soon afterwards. These she pieces together with her "half sense," and thinks he is the cause of all. She looks upon him with doubt, even aversion; and, when he would approach her, shrinks away with threatening gestures and angry looks. All this was shown only at intervals, and with pauses between—mostly by looks and slight action—a fitful vagueness being indicated throughout. The soul of sense being gone, the sweet mind had become "such stuff as dreams are made of." The body bore some resemblance to the rose of May; but it was only as the casket without the jewel. Nothing was left there of the thoughtful, reticent, gentle Ophelia. The unobtrusive calm which had formerly marked her demeanour had changed to waywardness. The forcing her way into the presence of the queen, where she had been used to go only when summoned, clamouring for her will, and with her winks, nods, and gestures, "strewing dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds," tells with a terrible emphasis how all is changed, and how her reason, too, has become "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

Poor rose of May ! Who does not give a sigh, a sob of grief, at miserable Gertrude's beautiful account of the accidental watery death of this fragile bud, cut down by a cold spring storm, before her true midsummer had arrived ? She sings her own requiem, and carries the flowers of her innocence along with her to the end. Like the fabled swan, with her death-song on her lips, she floats unconsciously among the water-lilies, till the kindly stream embraces and takes her to itself, and to "that blessed last of deaths, where death is dead."

Dear friend, these are little better than rough notes. I have written much, yet seem to have said nothing of what I would fain have said. "Piece out my imperfections with your thoughts."

Yours always affectionately,

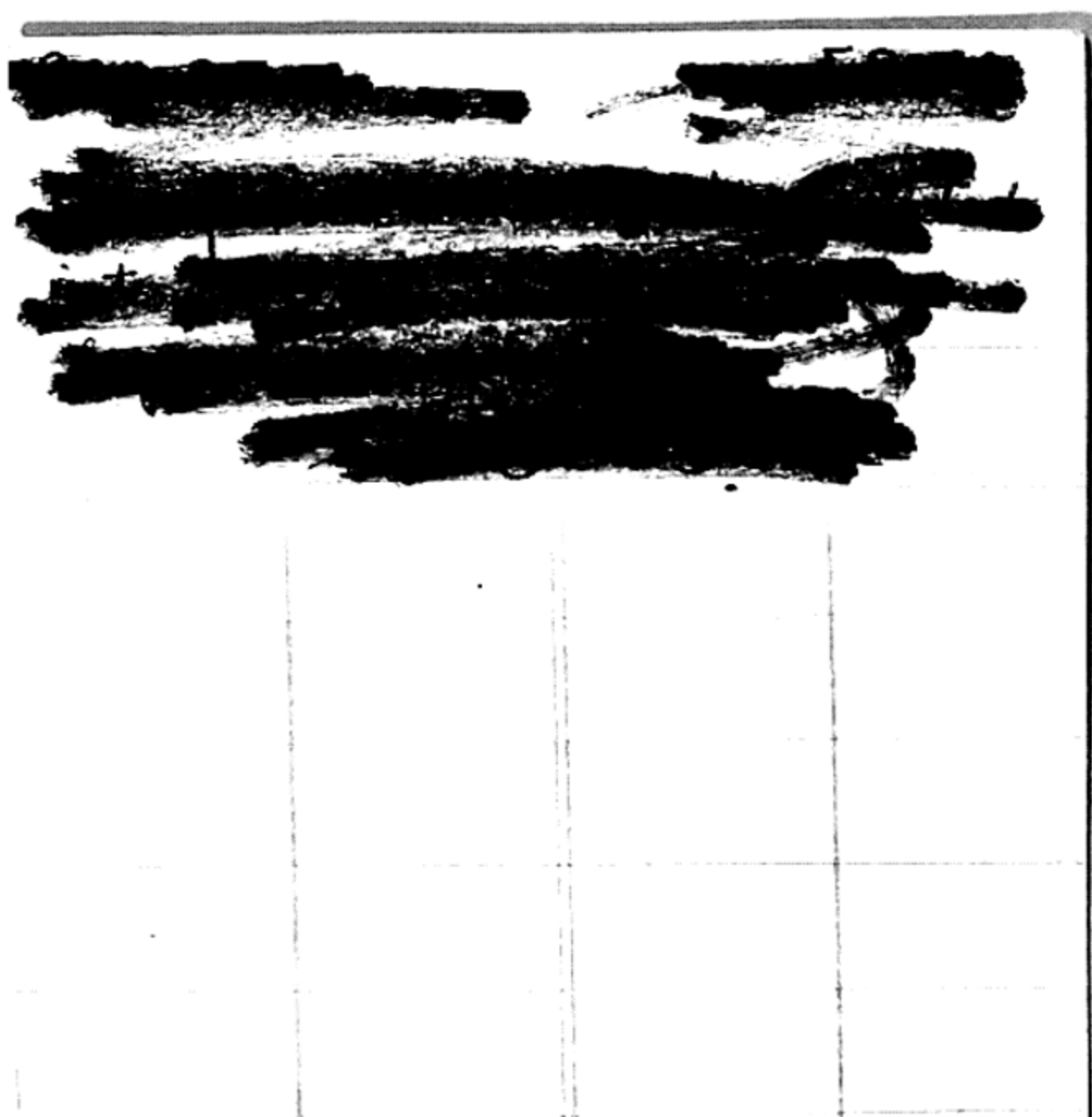
HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

To Miss GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY.

[illegible]

II.

P O R T I A



II.

P O R T I A.

13-12-13
H.

BRYNTYSILIO, NEAR LLANGOLLEN,
September 1, 1880.

"In Belmont is a lady richly left."

IT is such a pleasure to me, dear friend, to do anything to beguile your thoughts from the pain and weariness of your sick-bed, that I will try once more to do as you wish, and put on paper some of the ideas which have guided me in representing Portia. Your letter tells me that she is "one of your great heroines," and that you desire to hear about her most of all. I am very glad to know that you hold her to be a "real, typical, great lady and woman." This is my own idea. I have always classed her with Vittoria Colonna, Cassandra Fedele, and women of that stamp; and I have loved her all the more, perhaps, that from the days of Shakespeare to our own the stage has done her but scanty justice.

But it is of little moment to consider how far away from Shakespeare has been the Portia of the English stage, as we gather from its annals. Rather should we try to form a clear and definite conception of her character, and of her influence upon the main incidents of the play, by a conscientious study of her in the leaves of the great master's "unvalued book." This, then, is how she pictures herself to my mind.

I have always looked upon her as a perfect piece of Nature's handiwork. Her character combines all the graces of the richest womanhood with the strength of purpose, the wise helpfulness, and sustained power of the noblest manhood. Indeed, in this instance, Shakespeare shows us that it is the woman's keener wit and insight which see into and overcome the difficulty which has perplexed the wisest heads in Venice. For, without a doubt, as it seems to me at least, it is to her cultivated and bright intelligence, and not alone to the learned Dr Bellario, her cousin, that Bassanio is indebted for the release of his friend Antonio.

She comes before us at a time when, like another sweet Italian lady, she has "seen no age, nor known no sorrow." Alas for the sad fate which awaits poor Desdemona! But Portia has known no sorrow while she is before us, and we leave her in the gratified joy of having not only given to her husband "her house, her servants, and herself," but of having also, by her fine intelligence, rescued and restored to him his best-loved friend and kinsman.

To know how she has been able to accomplish this, we must go back to her youth. I think of her then as the cherished child of a noble father—a father proud of his child's beauty, and of the promise which he sees in her of rare gifts both of mind and heart. These gifts he spares no pains to foster. He is himself no ordinary man. He anticipates the danger to which his beautiful and wealthy heiress may be exposed; and it was by one of those "good inspirations" which, as Nerissa says, "holy men have at their death," that he fixed upon the device of the three caskets, "whereof who chooses his meaning, chooses" his beloved daughter.

From the first his aim has been to train her to succeed him in his high position. With this view he has surrounded her with all that is beautiful in art and ennobling in study, and placed her in the society of scholars, poets, soldiers, statesmen, the picked and noblest minds of her own and other lands. Amid this throng of honoured guests, not the least honoured, we may be sure, was the learned "cousin, Dr Bellario." This cousin of hers we may suppose to have been a constant visitor at princely Belmont, and, indeed, to have been her instructor

in jurisprudence—a not unfitting branch of the future heiress of Belmont's education. One can imagine how the girl Portia would turn to him for help in her youthful perplexities, and how charmed he must have been to see the hopeful dawning of that

“intuitive decision of a bright
And thorough-edged intellect,”

of which she was afterwards to give so signal a proof. It is obvious, at any rate, that she took an interest in his pursuits. Perhaps they have, even in those early days, “turned over many books together,” and so she may have in some measure unconsciously fitted herself for the great task which awaited her in the future.

Her father may have seen with pleased surprise the bias of her mind towards such studies; and this, as well as her affection for her learned teacher, may have led him to take her to some of the famous trials of the day, so that when her own hour of trial comes, when heart and head must alike be strong, and her self-possession is taxed to the uttermost, she knows at least the forms of the court, and through no technical ignorance would be likely to betray herself. If this were not so, how could she, however assured of her power to overcome the Jew, have dared to venture into the presence of such an assembly as that “great court of Venice,” where any failure would have been disastrous, not merely to herself, but to Bellario?

✓ Thus richly left, richly endowed, we find her, by her wise father's will, not allowed to “choose one or refuse none,” but forced to submit to be wooed, and sought by “renowned suitors” “whom the four winds blow in from every coast.” She feels this to be hard; but so deep is her reverence for her father, that she has schooled herself to bow implicitly to his will. “If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will.” She tells us, in her own playful way, how little the various “suitors who are already come” have won upon her—the Neapolitan prince who loves, and “does nothing but talk of his horse”; the young county Palatine who “smiles not,” “doth nothing but frown,” and is full of “unmannerly sadness”; the French lord, M. Le

Bon, who is "every man in no man," and who, in imitating all, has ended by retaining no individuality. But one thing he must have been—amusing; and we may be sure that in aftertimes he will be not unfrequently a guest at Belmont. Then, after descriptions of the English, the Scottish, and the German suitors, with their peculiarities hit off to a nicety, we find her prettily excusing herself by saying, "In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker." But there is no malice in her mind. Her descriptions make us see the men as though they were before us: few words, but vivid pictures.

The next two we are allowed to judge of for ourselves as they come before us with all the pomp of their great retinues. The Prince of Morocco bears himself nobly, and in "choosing wrong" shows at least that he rates Portia highly: "Never so rich a gem was set in worse than gold." And in taking leave he says: "I have too grieved a heart to take a tedious leave; thus losers part." Then arrives the Prince of Aragon, who, after refusing to "choose what many men desire," and "rank him with the barbarous multitudes," assumes desert, and chooses the silver casket containing the fool's head.

Portia cannot have been an unmoved spectator of these scenes. How must her heart have throbbed when in danger of having to accept such unwelcome husbands! For, although heart-whole, yet she is not "fancy free." We learn from her *dame d'honneur* and friend, Nerissa, that in her father's time there was one visitor, a "Venetian, a scholar, and a soldier," whom Nerissa considered of all men the "best deserving a fair lady." Portia responds very briefly, but suggestively: "I remember him well; and I remember him worthy of thy praise." Often, no doubt, has she wondered why he has not presented himself among her suitors. Unconsciously, perhaps, the languor of hope deferred speaks in the first words we hear from her lips: "By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is a-weary of this great world." The one who she thought might possibly have been among the first comers comes not at all.

After the departure of the Prince of Aragon arrives a messenger to announce the arrival of the "Lord Bassanio." He comes at last! but at what a cost she guesses not. We know,

from his description to Antonio, what he thinks of her: "Oh, she is fair, and fairer than that word, of wondrous virtues." Something stately as well as gracious there must have been in her beauty, for he likens her to "Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia." We know, in any case, that he is welcome. In the choosing of the caskets, the "soldier and the scholar" also shows himself something of a poet. How charmingly he apostrophises "fair Portia's counterfeit"!—*iii. 2. 115.*

"What demigod
Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes?
. . . Here are sever'd lips,
Parted with sugar breath: so sweet a bar
Should sunder such sweet friends. Here in her hairs
The painter plays the spider, and hath woven
A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs: but her eyes—
How could he see to do them? having made one,
Methinks it should have power to steal both his,
And leave itself unfurnish'd."

And here, as often in other places, I ask myself—Were the painters of Shakespeare's day grateful to him for what he said of their art? Or was it then, as too often now, that the follower of each art lived only in his own, looking down upon and knowing little of all the others; forgetting that it is out of the commingling of all arts that perfect work in any direction must come—as in nature all the elements, all the seasons, unite to form the exquisite harmonies and ever-varying pictures which we behold and admire in creation?

Throughout the early part of the last of the casket scenes, what tortures of suspense must Portia have endured, for by this time her heart has made its choice! How she must try to rest her faith in her father's love, and in the hope that the "good inspiration" which devised this choice of caskets, may prove itself in the choice of the one "who shall rightly love"! Hard it is for her to know the right casket and yet to give no hint; and not only not be herself "forsworn," but by ordering her suite "to stand aloof," far apart from the caskets, to ensure that no accident shall, unintentionally on the part of a bystander, direct Bassanio's choice!

With what a heart-leap she finds him choose the right casket!
with what excess of happiness!—

“O love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy,
In measure rein thy joy, scant this excess;
I feel too much thy blessing: make it less,
For fear I surfeit!”

Then, when Bassanio comes to claim her according to the “gentle scroll,” how frankly and nobly she gives him not only all he asks—herself—but her very all—with the desire that she could be “trebled *twenty times* herself”—“in virtues, beauties, livings, friends, exceed account”!

And now when congratulations are over, and their happiness appears complete, the evil news arrives, brought by Bassanio's friends Solanio, Lorenzo, and Jessica, of the overthrow of Antonio's fortune—that all his ventures had failed—that the time has gone by within which the bond might be redeemed, and that nothing now can drive the inexorable Jew “from the envious plea of forfeiture, of justice, and his bond.” Thus all at once comes the test which is to show that the union of Portia with Bassanio is indeed a “marriage of true minds.” It is enough that Antonio is the bosom friend of Bassanio—“the semblance of his soul”—to assure her that he is worthy to be hers also. For, in her own words,—

“In companions
That do converse and waste the time together,
Whose souls do bear an equal yoke of love,
There must be needs a like proportion
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit.”

Moreover, what a picture of that friend has Bassanio given!—

“The dearest friend to me, the kindest man;
 . . . and one in whom
The ancient Roman honour more appears,
Than any that draws breath in Italy.”

At first, Portia evidently does not realise the extent of the Jew's malignity. She feels that, at any sacrifice, he must be bought over to cancel his bond, and she believes that this is possible. After having read Antonio's letter, she has but one

thought—to hasten Bassanio's departure, with ample means to satisfy the Jew. But first she must give him the right to use her means as his own; he must indeed be lord of all:—

“First go with me to church, and call me wife :
And then away to Venice to your friend.”

During the time, brief as it can be made, of the preparation for the marriage ceremony, Portia will have heard all the particulars of the “merry bond”; she will have discovered that money alone, however squandered, cannot shake the obdurate Jew's determination. Accustomed, as I have before suggested, by her peculiar training, to look with a judicial mind upon serious matters, she, after many questionings about its terms, hits by a happy instinct, as I believe, upon the flaw in the bond. She will say nothing of this to Bassanio before consulting her learned cousin; but hurries him away with her wealth to use as his own, and then herself hastens towards Venice, after despatching a messenger to Bellario, with a letter informing him of her approach, as well as of her belief that she has found a flaw in the bond, and requesting his presence at the trial.

✓ We find her, before her departure, in the brightest spirits, feeling virtually assured of success, and even jesting in her new happiness with Nerissa as to who shall

“prove the prettier fellow of the two,
And wear her dagger with the braver grace.”

✓ This state of mind, it appears to me, could not have been possible, had Portia known what was before her. She is at ease, because she is sure of the full sympathy of her friend and cousin, Bellario, and counts with confidence on his presence in Venice to take the lead in court; and so, after giving her house into the care of Lorenzo and Jessica, who are to be treated in their absence as Lord Bassanio and herself, she goes gaily on to Venice with Nerissa. They will have to haste away, for they “must measure twenty miles to-day.”

In the play we see that Portia sends Balthazar, her trusty servant whom she has “ever found honest, true,” to Dr Bellario with her letter of instructions, and bids him wait for her at “the

traject,¹ the common ferry which trades to Venice." But either her mind must have changed, or she must have met messengers from Bellario on the road, who tell her of his illness and inability to help her in person. Consequently, she hurries on to Padua; but when they meet—for that they do meet is certain—all her first joyful anticipations receive a woful shock. She finds her dear old friend grievously sick. What is to be done? There is no help near; no time to be lost! The Jew "plies the Duke at morning and at night." Bellario's aid, she learns, has been summoned already by the Duke as a last resource. In this extremity, with no other help at hand, Bellario doubtless proposes that Portia shall go in his stead, recommended by him as a "young doctor of Rome," then visiting him. This must be done, or all is lost. Bellario confirms her belief as to the flaw in the bond, and furnishes her with his "own opinions" upon all the points of law most vital to the question. They "turn o'er many books together," and Portia proceeds to Venice, furnished, as Bellario writes to the Duke, with the Doctor's opinion, "which, bettered with his own learning (the greatness whereof I cannot enough commend), goes with him, at my importunity, to fill up your Grace's request in my stead." All this suggests to me that Portia's eye had been the first to see the flaw in the bond, and that her own impression had been confirmed by the great lawyer.

Grave and anxious must have been her thoughts as she crossed the lagoons by "the common ferry which trades to Venice." Hers was not a mind, however, to shrink before difficulty; and, confirmed as she has been by the opinion of the great doctor of laws, she feels sure of success, if she can but be true to herself, and "forget she is a woman." All the gay light-heartedness with which she started from Belmont has vanished under this unexpected aspect of affairs. With what trepidation, with what anxious sense of responsibility, must she find herself engaged in such a task—the mark for every eye, the "observed of all observers"! Nothing but her deep love, and grateful happy heart,

¹ One of the most persistent errors of the text, carried on from the first folio, is "tranect," when Shakespeare evidently wrote "traject," the equivalent for "traghetto," the word which may be seen at every ferry in Venice—"Traghetto della Salute," &c.

could sustain her through such a trial. To cease to be a woman for the time is not so hard, perhaps, to one who has all her life been accustomed to a position of command and importance; but, in the peculiar circumstances of this case, the effort must have been one of extreme difficulty. ✓

✓ How skilfully, firmly, and gently she begins her task! We may believe that she had some sympathy with Shylock. ✓ She has lately made his undutiful daughter welcome, because she is wedded to her husband's friend. She cannot approve of Jessica's uncalled-for accusation of her father:—

“ I have heard him swear . . .
That he would rather have Antonio's flesh,
Than twenty times the value of the sum
That he did owe him.”

But with her usual thoughtful kindness she feels for the stranger Jewess, and, during her own absence, puts her in a position in which her servants must show her all respect.

Jessica must have had, no doubt, a sad enough life after her mother's death. We see that Shylock was not of a nature to win love or respect from those immediately about him. Mean-ness and distrust were in the atmosphere which he made around him in his home life. Jessica says, “Our house is hell.” That she can, despite her training, appreciate goodness and virtue, may be inferred from what she says of Portia—

“ Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match,
And on the wager lay two earthly women,
And Portia one, there must be something else
Pawn'd with the other; for the poor rude world
Hath not her fellow.”

Still, I believe Portia to have more sympathy with the Jew than with his daughter. ✓ She feels for the race that has been proscribed, insulted, execrated, from generation to generation. She finds some excuse for the deep hereditary hate which the Jew has for his Christian oppressor, and for his desire of vengeance in the name and for the sake of his persecuted tribe. She would have understood his yearning for the death of the man who had “disgraced and hindered him of half a million”; but not that he himself should desire to be the cruel executioner.

The Duke, in his opening address to Shylock, tells him what it is "thought" he will do:—

"That thou but lead'st this fashion of thy malice
To the last hour of act ; and then, 'tis thought,
Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty," &c.

As if the "stony adversary, the inhuman wretch," had been keeping up the show of enforcing the letter of his bond out of mere wantonness ! The "gentle answer" expected was not likely to be given after such an appeal : a much less merciless adversary would hardly have been moved by it. Who likes it to be taken for granted that he is going to do a good action ?—to be told that it is expected ? Such an appeal would be likely to make even a gentle nature perverse. The treatment of the Jew by the friends of Antonio is also little calculated to bend him from his purpose. It would only, if possible, harden his heart still more.

At this point enters the "young doctor of Rome, his name Balthazar." We may conceive the angry eyes with which the Jew looks at him. But, instead of insulting and taunting him like the rest and as he had expected, the stranger simply asks if he is Shylock, and says, "Of a strange nature is the suit you follow"—thus putting him at his ease, and securing Shylock's attention by the assurance "that the Venetian law cannot impugn him" in acting as he did. Antonio is asked if he confesses the bond. He does confess it. Then the climax seems to have been reached. The "*something else*" is kept in the background until every other argument has failed. The Jew must now take the initiative. The young doctor owns that they are in his power. He is in the right—confessed by all to be so ; and *therefore* he can afford to be—he "*must be merciful*." The rude, unmannerly answer of the Jew, "On what compulsion must I ? tell me that," is met with grave gentleness. This quality of mercy must not be "strained." There is no compulsion in it : of its own sweet will it "droppeth upon the place beneath." The blessing it brings is to the giver as well as to the receiver : its region is beyond and above kingly sceptres ; it is in the hearts of the highest ones of earth, and is an attribute of

"God himself"—his God as well as the Christian's—the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob!

In Portia we see embodied the spirit of good, which it is her first, her paramount desire, should prevail over the spirit of evil. She would gladly have given largely of her fortune to turn Shylock from his cruel purpose—to give him an insight into the happiness, the blessedness, of showing mercy and forgiveness. She who has lately been made so happy in her gratified love, what would she not give, out of her full heart, to prove her gratitude to the All-Giver, and soften for His use, however little that might be, this one human heart?

After this sublime appeal, the Jew is again assured of the "justice of his plea," so that his sacrifice in giving it up shall be the nobler. He is only asked to "mitigate" it: at some (perhaps not far-off) time he may himself have to pray to his God for mercy, and the thought of that same needful prayer should surely teach him "to render the deeds of mercy." This, alas! only brings from his stubborn heart the cry—

"My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,
The penalty and forfeit of my bond."

Then the temptation of money is held out to him. The loan is to be paid thrice—nay, "ten times" over. To no avail. Portia, as a last resource, tries to bring before his mind's eye the horror of the deed—the gash, the quivering flesh, which is to be "cut off nearest the merchant's heart"—the seat of life. She sees in imagination the fainting, dying man, and, with a shudder, turns to Shylock, and bids him at least have by a surgeon to stop the wounds, "lest he do bleed to death." No, not even that. "'Tis not in the bond." He will not do even "thus much for charity." Now all is clear. ✓

At this point, I have always felt in the acting that my desire to find extenuations for Shylock's race and for himself leaves me, and my heart grows almost as stony as his own. I see his fiendish nature fully revealed. I have seen in fancy the knife sharpened to cut quickly through the flesh; the scales brought forward to weigh it; have watched the cruel, eager eyes, all strained and yearning to see the blood welling from the side

"nearest the heart," and gloating over the fancied agonies and death-pangs of his bitter foe. This man-monster, this pitiless savage nature, is beyond the pale of humanity: it must be made powerless to hurt. I have felt that with him the wrongs of his race are really as nothing compared with his own remorseless hate. He is not longer the wronged and suffering man; and I longed to pour down on his head the "justice" he has clamoured for, and will exact without pity.

The Jew has been probed to the uttermost. It is now clear, beyond all question, that it is Antonio's *life* which this "merry bond" was intended to purchase, and that nothing short of it will satisfy Shylock's "lodged hate." He has by his own confession brought his life within the compass of the law. Then, like a crushing avalanche, slowly but surely sweeps down upon him the avenging, much-forbearing power, the "*something else*" which has hitherto been held in hand by the young doctor. Then the blood, which "is not in the bond," which has not been bargained for, flows in to wash away the bond (better now had it been torn up, as Portia wished), and to bring on the murderous Jew his just punishment, the forfeiture of life, substance, all. Thus the blood which he had so yearned to shed, but has overlooked in the bond, is ordained to be the Nemesis which shall overwhelm and destroy him, sweep him from his pride of place among his tribe, rob him of half his dearly-gotten wealth, and take away his desire to accumulate more, by forcing him to "render it upon his death to the gentleman who lately stole his daughter."

Blow upon blow! For now as a crowning shame the Jew must go through the form of being made a Christian. We may be sure that Portia would not have included this in the judgment which she pronounces as the mouthpiece of the court. It is Antonio, who, when asked by her, "What mercy can you render him, Antonio?" after disposing of his substance, and requesting that the fine should be reduced from the whole to one-half of his goods, closes with the stipulation that "for this favour he presently become a Christian." This looks like a piece of cruelty, unworthy of Antonio's character. Can he believe that the mere name of Christian could "soften that—than which what's harder?—his Jewish heart"? And yet we cannot accuse

Antonio of malignity. "A kinder gentleman treads not the earth," say his friends and those who know him best. We must not take Shylock's report of him. Shylock speaks out of the hate he bears him, because of his interference with what he calls his "well-won thrift." Antonio "has brought down the rate of usance," helped the poor, wrested from Shylock's grasp despairing wretches whom he would have stripped of their all, then thrown aside to starve or die as they might.

"He seeks my life ; his reason well I know :
I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures
Many that have at times made moan to me :
Therefore he hates me."

When Antonio asks that Shylock shall be made a Christian, we must remember that he himself has only just escaped the sharpened knife which, in imagination, had been already tasting his life-blood. Still, even this would not make wilfully cruel this

"kindest man,
The best-condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies."

of himing a Christian

We must take his demand as a proof of the state of feeling which prevailed at the time in which he lived—a time when Christians, even the best of them, had inherited the worst prejudices against the Jews. Their ancient misdemeanours, their exactions, their usurious practices, their oppressions, all were remembered against them, while no voice was raised in extenuation or excuse. All agreed in despising and execrating this vindictive and extortionate race. Antonio had seen Shylock exercising his craft and turning it to the vilest uses. Perhaps he thinks, in the spirit of his age, that forcing him to be a Christian may work some miraculous change in his heart. We must at least believe that he did not put this indignity upon him in mere wantonness of spirit.

After declining the Duke's courtesies, on the plea of the necessity for her immediate return to Padua, Portia, in her haste to be home a day before her husband, is not inclined to linger on the road, even to receive, as the young doctor, the thanks of

Antonio and her husband; but, seeing the ring on Bassanio's finger, the thought passes across her mind of testing how deeply he values it. After the long strain upon her brain, the sense of relief which follows the deliverance of Antonio must find vent in some new channel. The "marriage-bells" which for the first time ring in her heart must not yet be heard by others. She must keep up and carry out her self-imposed character to the end. So, as she cannot take gold, she asks Antonio for his gloves, which she will wear for his sake—gloves were dainties in those days—and Bassanio for his ring. The latter request being refused, the doctor affects to be slightly indignant, refuses to accept aught else, and takes a hasty leave. The ring is sent after him, as we know, at Antonio's intercession, and the clerk despatched for the Jew's signature to the deed, which is to "be well welcome" to Lorenzo—and the journey to Belmont is begun.

Here messengers must have overtaken Portia on her way back (but not, as on her journey to Venice, messengers bearing ill news), with letters which make her aware of the good fortune of Antonio, in that "three of his argosies have richly come to harbour suddenly." Portia has presumed a little too much on having the start of Bassanio by many hours, and, as we learn from Stephano, she has strayed about by holy crosses on her way home—

"Where she kneels and prays
For happy wedlock hours."

Thus it is that, notwithstanding all the means at her disposal, and the help which she could command from her trusty servant Balthazar, Portia arrives only so immediately before her husband, who was not likely to pause by the way, that she has barely time to warn her household to take no notice of her having been absent, when a trumpet proclaims the tidings of the near approach of Bassanio and his suite. At once she welcomes him "*home*," and bids Antonio welcome to "*our house*"; and thus graciously makes him feel that it is only as the mistress of his friend's house that she bids him welcome.

What a scene is before them! Nature welcomes them in the tranquil moonlight, so congenial to their own thoughts and

wearied senses; and even the weight of their excess of happiness is lifted from them by the pleasant little embarrassment caused by the parting with the rings, which Portia has happily devised to bring about the discovery that she was the doctor and Nerissa the clerk.

Think, too, of the exquisite contrast between the opening of the play and its close. It begins in the blaze of garish day, in the bustling streets of Venice. Yet are the first words of the great Venetian merchant tinged with sadness—"In truth, I know not why I am so sad"—a sadness prophetic of the coming storm in which he was so soon to be involved by his devotion to his friend. It closes far away from the great city, in a garden faintly lighted by the moon, as she pales before the coming morn, no trace of sadness left in the merchant's heart—for have not his devotion, his very danger, led to the happiest issues?

And now the newly-made husband, who left Belmont in the deepest dejection and full of anxiety for his best friend, returns to it with that friend, all trouble over, and is welcomed by its mistress as its lord. This friend's safety he owes also to the noble lady, who before had given him so generously her house, her servants, and herself. The deeds of his after-life must speak for him, for she had indeed "bereft him of all words." And so the curtain falls, Portia having strewed blessings upon all around her.

But I could never part with my characters when the curtain fell and the audience departed. As I had lived with them through their early lives, so I also lived into their future. I saw Bassanio and Antonio despatched by Portia the next day to Padua to talk over with her cousin Bellario the critical scene so lately gone through, and bearing with them her injunctions and fond messages to bring the sick man back, if possible, to be nursed into health at Belmont.

For Portia I have always dreamed out a holier and far more difficult task. I do not believe that such a woman as I conceive her to have been would leave the despised, deserted Jew to his fate. When she finds that even Antonio's "mercy" is not of the kind to satisfy her woman's heart, she vows to herself that,

out of her own great happiness, and in abounding gratitude for it, she will devote herself to the all but impossible task of converting this "inexorable Jew." She goes alone to his wretched, lonely home, to which he has been accompanied only by the execrations of the mob. These still ring in his sick ears as he lies there stunned, bewildered, defeated, deserted. But sharper, more harrowing than all, are his self-upbraidings that he should have left a loophole in the bond by which the hated Christian merchant has escaped. In his rage, in his bitter self-accusations, he lashes himself into a state of frenzy. If left alone much longer to these wild, mad moods, he might destroy himself. But, before he has time for this, comes to his door, and will not be denied, this noble lady. He knows her not, roughly enough forbids her entrance; but with gentle force, and with the charm of her winning manners and noble and gracious presence, she contrives to gain an entrance. It is little she can do in her first visits. Still she repeats them, bringing wine and oil and nourishment for the sick body, and sacred ointment for the bruised mind. The reviled, despised Jew finds himself for the first time (for, oh, so long!) tended, thought of, cared for. Why should this be? Never has this been since his early days,—since his beloved Leah left him, perhaps in his early manhood, when the grief at her loss hardened his heart. Her gentle presence by his side through life might have softened down his worst passions, which were only aggravated by the blow sustained in her loss. His young daughter may have resembled her mother in feature, but not in character; he has therefore cared little for her—put no faith, no trust in her. The Jew would find in Portia a likeness to his beautiful Leah; would, in his weakness, fancy the tender sympathetic eyes, looking so gently on him, were hers; would hear her voice when "in accents very low," and with "a most silver flow"

"Of subtle-paced counsel in distress,
Right to the heart and brain, though undescried,
Winning its way with extreme gentleness,
Through all the outworks of suspicious pride,"

she sought first to draw from him a slow permission for her visits. Then on the Jew's side would come a looking forward

to their recurrence ; then a hoping, wishing for them, until gradually she had drawn from him from time to time the story of his life, of his woes, of his own wrongs, of the wrongs of his race, of his sweet lost wife ; of his ungrateful daughter, who in her flight took not only his ducats, his jewels, but the ring given him by Leah, "when he was a bachelor." We can imagine what a sympathising ear was lent to all his tale ; how she gave him "a world of sighs,"—this man, who had through life chiefly met with curses and execrations. We can imagine, too, how, little by little, she reminded him of words which *somewhere, at some time*—but little heeded then—he had heard tell of that "quality of mercy," "which droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath"—that place being his poor, withered heart. He would *see now* "the deeds of mercy." He would not recognise the hand which, as the "reverend doctor," had dealt out such uncompromising "justice." But he would begin to feel that, had he gained his cruel will, and his "deeds been on his head"—had he been let to *use* that hungry knife,—there would have been "the smell o' the blood" under his nostrils day and night ; and that same blood would have been upon his soul for ever. Not even the solemn rites of his fathers could have washed it away !

These are his *own* reflections ; not forced upon him by Portia. He will recognise her life of self-denial. He will know that with every luxury, every happiness around her, she leaves them all continually to sit with, and comfort, and console his sick body and broken spirit. He cannot understand it. How can he show that he is grateful ? He will do as she wishes ; will see the daughter on whom he has poured his curse ; will put his blessing in the place of it ; will even look upon her Christian husband.

But I have imagined both daughter and husband much altered, purified. Lorenzo, on reflection, has been ashamed, not perhaps so much of stealing the Jew's daughter, as of accepting the stolen ducats and jewels which she brought with her, and would be longing, if he dared, to make restitution and confess his meanness. Jessica, under the roof of Portia, and within the sphere of her noble influence, could not fail to grow better and purer.

She early shows herself capable of appreciating Portia's character when Lorenzo asks her, "How dost thou like the Lord Bassanio's wife?"

"Past all expressing. It is very meet
The Lord Bassanio live an upright life :
For having such a blessing in his lady,
He finds the joys of heaven here on earth."

As her character improves, becoming chastened and ennobled, she will reflect upon the graceless step she took in leaving her old, lonely father, whatever might have been his faults, and in robbing him, too. How can she look for happiness in her wedded life, she who has commenced it so unworthily? Oh that she could make reparation! She must know the sentence passed upon her father in the court at Venice. How, then, can she be happy? And so some day, permission being obtained by Portia, she may be seen at the feet of the old man, there sobbing out her grief and her contrition; and he will remember that he made her "home a hell," and look gently upon her. Will this be for him the first taste of the blessedness of mercy? "It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

I think that the Jew will not live long. His body and mind have been too sorely bruised and shaken. But Portia's spell will be upon him to the end. His last looks will be upon the eyes which have opened his, and shown him the "light to lighten his darkness"; and he who was despised, reviled, and himself at war with all men, will now have felt the happiness of bestowing forgiveness, and the blessed hope of being himself forgiven.

And so I have thought out Portia. She will have, like other mortals, sorrows, sufferings, troubles. But she will bear them humbly, patiently, bravely. The hand and heart will ever remain open to help and comfort others. She will retain her gay, bright spirit. She will have always her gracious, attractive manners, and will spread around her in her home an atmosphere which will make Belmont an earthly paradise to those fortunate ones who are welcomed to it. But only her husband will know *all* her winning goodness: for him will be kept the inner life, the insight into her heart of hearts: to him alone she will be the friend of friends, "the perfect wife."

Much of what I have written you will perhaps think fanciful. But this is how Portia has pictured herself to my thoughts. Dear friend, does it at all explain to you the secret of what you so kindly call my "wonderful silent acting in the casket scene"?

Ever affectionately yours,

HELENA F. MARTIN.

To MISS GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY.

[One or two of my friends, who have seen this letter when printed only for private circulation, and on whose opinion I place a high value, have objected to my "dream" about Portia's conduct towards Shylock, after the curtain falls, as being conceived too much in the feeling of the present century. I have, therefore, reconsidered the matter, but cannot give up my first impression.

Shakespeare, in the self-defence which he puts into the Jew's mouth, says all he can for him. In his day, with the strong antagonism felt toward the Jews by his audiences, he would not, whatever he felt, have dared to say more in their favour; and I always maintain that Shakespeare wrote his plays most distinctly for audiences, and not for closet readers merely, although he shows the marvel of his genius in being so fitted for both that each claims him as their own. But I believe that, as he foresaw the woman who was to simulate the doctor, and put into Portia's heart that "most excellent gift of charity," and into her mouth that divine speech of mercy, so he would not blame me if I thought her one of the exceptional beings who have lived in all ages, who have gone out of and beyond the bounded present, and acted the part which, in our own age, though always exciting admiration, would in no way create surprise.

With the essence of Christianity within her, the Jew, who had by the enforced change of his creed become an outcast even from his tribe, was the nearest to her pity. His merciless nature when outraged could only be appeased by, as it were, dipping his revenge, when opportunity came, in the blood, and watching

the slow torturing death-throes of his foe. Where, then, could such a creature find a resting-place, when thwarted in the line of action which even the law of his land, he had been assured, could not impugn? Never could despair be deeper than his, and never was help more needed. And who so fit to give help as the one who had unconsciously brought all this misery on his head?

Shylock's money, as Portia knew, had been borrowed to bring the lover of her choice to woo and win her. His daughter had been induced to leave her home, and take with her his precious gold and jewels, by the friend and with the knowledge of her husband, and by that husband's wish had been made welcome to her home. Portia knows all this if the Jew does not; and, knowing this, would not her heart be the first to think of and turn in pity towards the miserable and forsaken outcast? To her he was as no common Jew. His means as usurer had helped to perfect her life. Could her happiness be unalloyed while another suffered shame and misery, no matter whether deserved or not, because of her? I still "dream" that it could not, and believe that, quietly and privately, as her high station permitted, she might have done what no other dared, or perhaps cared to do.

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

31 ONSLOW SQUARE, LONDON.]

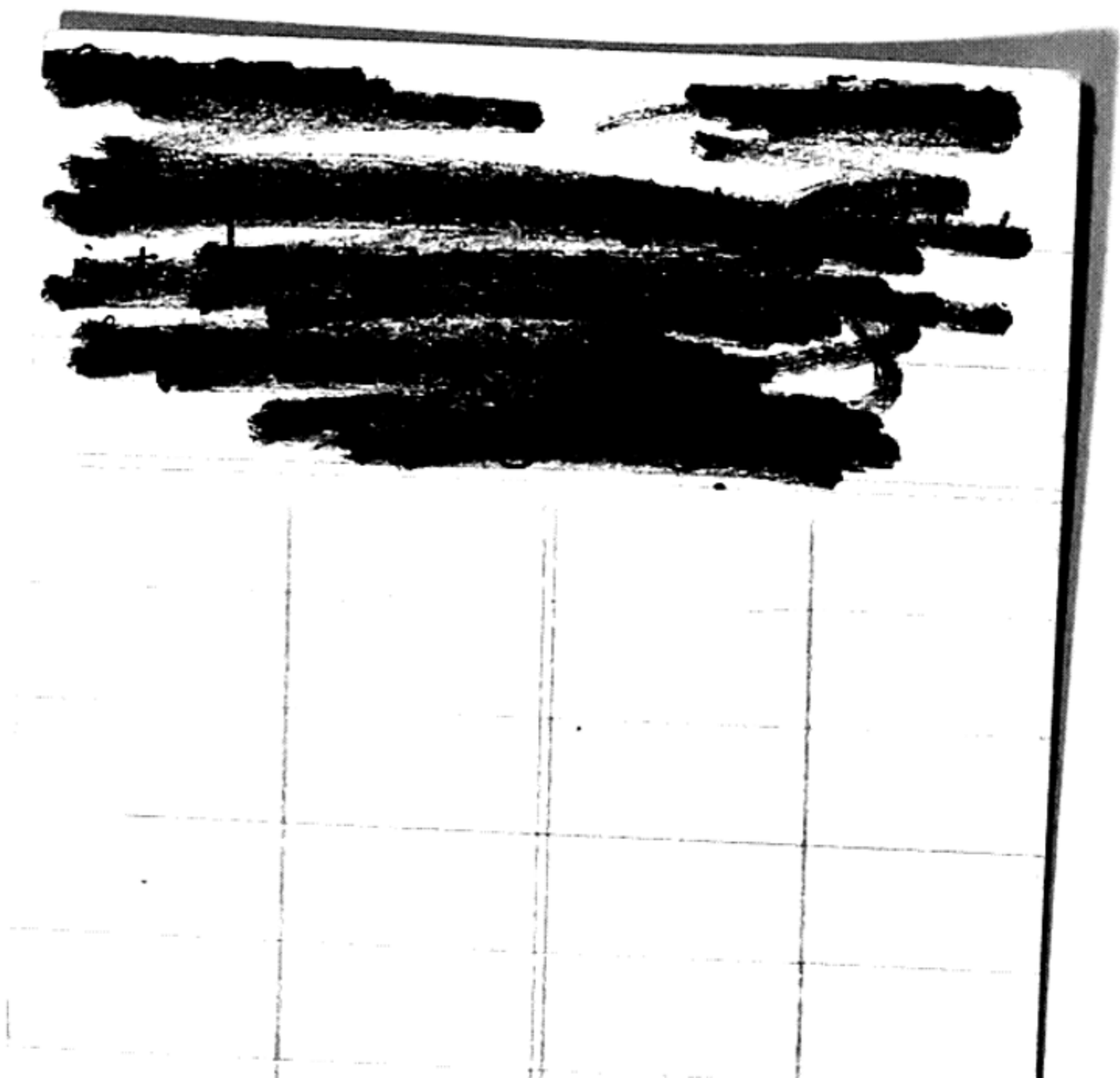
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III.

DESDEMONA



III.

DESDEMONA.

BRYNTYSILIO, NEAR LLANGOLLEN, NORTH WALES,
September 10, 1880.

“My fair warrior.” “Oh, she was heavenly true!”

YES, my dear friend, I will try to gratify your wish, that I should put before you in words the Desdemona that was in my heart and mind in the days when I was first called to personate her upon the stage. It was among my earliest efforts, and I was then a very young girl; but she had been long for me a heroine into whose life I had entered with a passionate sympathy which I cannot even now recall without emotion. In the gallery of heroes and heroines which my young imagination had fitted up for my daily and nightly reveries, Desdemona filled a prominent place. How could it be otherwise? A being so bright, so pure, so unselfish, generous, courageous—so devoted in her love, so unconquerable in her allegiance to her “kind lord,” even while dying by his hand; and all this beauty of body and mind blasted by the machinations of a soulless villain, who “out of her own goodness” made the net that enmeshed her too credulous husband and her absolutely guileless self!

(The manner, too, of her death increased her hold upon my imagination. Owing, I suppose, to delicate health and the weak action of my heart, the fear of being smothered haunted me con-

tinually. The very thought of being in a crowd, of any pressure near me, would fill me with terror. I would give up any pleasure rather than face it. Thus it was, I suppose, that because of this continued terror of my own, the manner of Desdemona's death had a fearful significance for me. (That she should, in the midst of this frightful death-agony, be able not only to forgive her torturer, but to keep her love for him unchanged, was a height of nobleness surpassing that of all the knights and heroes I had ever heard or read of.) Hers, too, was "the pang without the palm." Juliet, Cordelia, Imogen, Hermione, sufferers as they were, had no such trial as this. (For hers was the supreme anguish of dying, while the one in whose regard she desired to stand highest believed her tainted and impure! To a loving, noble woman, what fate could be more terrible?)

Of course I did not know in those days that Desdemona is usually considered a merely amiable, simple, yielding creature, and that she is generally so represented on the stage. This is the last idea that would have entered my mind. To me she was in all things worthy to be a hero's bride, and deserving the highest love, reverence, and gratitude from the noble Moor. "Gentle" she was, no doubt (the strong are naturally gentle)—and Othello in one place calls her so. But he uses the epithet in the Italian and old English sense, implying that union of nobility of person and of disposition which shows itself in an unconscious grace of movement and of outward appearance. This was what I imagine was in Wordsworth's mind when speaking of "the gentle lady married to the Moor"; and, when he discoursed on that favourite theme on which, he says, "right voluble I am," I can fancy that he drew his heroine in much the same lines as those in which she presented herself to my young imagination. I cannot think he would have singled her out in his famous sonnet, had he not thought her as brave as she was generous, as high of heart as she was sweet of nature, or had he regarded her as a soft, insipid, plastic creature, ready to do any one's bidding, and submit placidly to any ill-usage from mere weakness and general characterless docility. Oh, no! Such creatures do not win the love of the purest and noblest, the attachment and admiration of all.

It was well for me that I never saw Desdemona, or indeed any of Shakespeare's heroines, on the stage, before I had to impersonate them myself. I was thus hampered by no traditions, and my ideals were not interfered with by recollections of what others had done. I struggled, as best I could, to give expression to the characters as I had thought them out for myself, looking only at the text, and ignoring all commentators and critics, who perplexed but did not help me. Crude and imperfect as my conceptions were—and no one found this out sooner than myself, as time and experience widened and corrected them—they yet seemed to make themselves felt by my audiences, who, to my surprise and delight, were always most encouraging and indulgent to me.

Very often I meet people who tell me they saw my first performances, and speak of them as though they were great triumphs. (You ask me to talk of myself, so you see I do.) They were better satisfied than I was, because I knew that I could do much better with further study and practice.

But ah, how my heart ached when sometimes great names were flung at me! A Siddons, an O'Neill—what could I know of them? How they thought about my heroines—for they were mine, a part of me—I could not tell. Did they look at them with the same eyes, think the same thoughts about them, as I did? No one could tell me that. I was only told with what grand effect one spoke certain lines, how another looked and sobbed and fainted in a certain situation. Fortunately for me, the critics then, as now, did not all agree. I was not allowed to see the newspapers; but unkind criticisms are sure to find their way to one somehow, through one channel or another, and to make their sting felt. A critic, to be of use, and give a lesson worth learning, should point out first what is good—for no work worth speaking of at all can be without some good—then the faults specified can be listened to in a patient and proper spirit.

Happily, however, there were not a few who did not daunt me with tales of my predecessors, but encouraged me to persevere in my own course, to trust to my own conceptions, and to believe that these would work out a more adequate expression as I gained a greater mastery of my art. Among such, my Desdemona was

peculiarly welcomed as rescuing the character, as I was told, out of the commonplace, and lifting her into her true position in the tragedy. This view was especially pressed upon me by Mr Elton, the gentleman who acted Brabantio—an excellent actor in Mr Macready's picked company, who, alas! was drowned in a shipwreck a year or two later. He told me that my Desdemona was a new creation for him; that, to use his own phrase—and I remember it well—it restored the balance of the play by giving her character its due weight in the action, so that, as he said, he had then seen the tragedy for the first time in its true *chiaro-oscuro*. Words no less encouraging fell from Mr Macready, my Othello. He told me my brightness and gaiety in the early happy scenes at Cyprus helped him greatly, and that, when sadder, I was not lachrymose; and, above all, that I added intensity to the last act by “being so difficult to kill.” Indeed I felt in that last scene as if it were a very struggle for my own life. I would not die with my honour tarnished, without the chance of disabusing my husband's mind of the vile thoughts that clouded it. I felt for *him* as well as for myself—for I knew what remorse and misery would overwhelm him when he came to know how cruelly he had wronged me; and therefore I threw into my remonstrances all the power of passionate appeal I could command.

I recall with gratitude the comfort and instruction for which I was indebted to my good friend Brabantio—my “cruel father,” as I used to call him. He was the kindest and gentlest of men; thoroughly well read, of fine tastes, and an accomplished rather than a powerful actor. It seems but yesterday that I sat by his side in the green-room at the reading of Robert Browning's beautiful drama, “The Blot in the Scutcheon.” As a rule, Mr Macready always read the new plays. But owing, I suppose, to some press of business, the task was intrusted on this occasion to the head prompter—a clever man in his way, but wholly unfitted to bring out, or even understand, Mr Browning's conception. Consequently, the delicate, subtle lines were twisted, perverted, and sometimes even made ridiculous in his hands. My “cruel father” was a warm admirer of the poet. He sat writhing and indignant, and tried by gentle asides to make me see the real meaning of the verse. Unhappily the mischief proved irreparable; for some

of the actors during the rehearsals chose to continue to misunderstand the text, and never took the interest in the play which they must have done had Mr Macready read it first—for he had great power as a reader. I have always thought it was in a great measure owing to this *contretemps* that a play so thoroughly dramatic failed, despite its painful story, to make the great success which was justly its due.¹

Kind Mr Elton! In those cold, cheerless, wintry days, his salutation was always the same: "Well, how does Spring Morning?" And if my eyes and heart were heavy from having heard my faults harshly censured at home, he would say—noticing, I suppose, my depressed manner—"So April showers have been falling!" When I asked him to watch and check my faults, he positively refused, saying that "I heard already too much of them. I must remember I was passing through my novitiate—not, like most others, before a provincial, but before a London audience, and that I must expect to have much to learn. But if I kept always thinking of myself and my shortcomings, I should spoil my style, the charm of which was my self-forgetfulness and power of identifying myself with the character I was acting. How was I to be a real Juliet or Desdemona if I had my defects always uppermost in my mind? I must trust to their falling away from me by thought and practice in my art." He was the more tender, I can now see, partly in consequence of my extreme sensitiveness and my dissatisfaction with my own efforts, and partly from seeing too strong a disposition in Mr Macready to take exception to everything I did that was not exactly in accordance with his own notions. "My dear, you are entirely wrong in this conception," was a phrase constantly in his mouth. The young girl was expected to take the same view as the ripe artist, who had had great experience, no doubt, but who had also confirmed habits, and whose strong masculine mind had in it but little of the feminine element. But I believed in him, and could not act by his side without being moved and influenced by his intense earnestness and power. I tried hard to do what he advised—too much perhaps; for you may remember, I was accused of having caught

¹ See Appendix, p. 395.

his manner and expression. It was almost impossible to do otherwise, considering the many hours we had to pass under his direction. Rehearsals began at ten in the morning, and usually went on until three or four. When reviving an old, or bringing out a new play, these rehearsals were as a rule continued daily for three weeks at least, sometimes for four or five.

Still, unflinching disciplinarian as he was, Mr Macready was not always stern. He could joke, and had "pretty things to say" upon occasion. I always did my best to be punctual; but I had to drive three miles to the theatre—a distance which, if I had acted the previous night, I found rather trying in the early winter mornings. I remember well one morning when I was a little late, I found that I had been already "called" for the stage. On reaching it, I made my apologies, but said that if they looked at the time they would find I was but ten minutes after the hour, and I understood that ten minutes' grace was always given. "Ah," said Mr Macready, turning gravely to me, "not to you! We all agree that you do not require it: you have enough already." A rebuke so pleasantly given was not likely to hurt much.

Then with all his sternness, how tender-hearted he was in the case of illness! All knew that, for the great exertion of the lungs in this my first girlhood, Nature revenged herself by inflicting on me a cough which harassed and distressed me night and day. Often, often has Mr Macready said to me; "My poor child, your cough goes to my heart. How I wish I could spare you!" And when at last, in my third winter, I was ordered to give up my work and go to a milder climate for a year, he never omitted writing to me week by week, advising me what books to read, and encouraging me to write and give him my criticisms upon them;¹ sending me news of the theatre; and, best of all, bidding me get well soon, as I was greatly

¹ Mr Macready was not, so far as I knew, given to writing verses. It was, therefore, a very pleasant surprise to me, when he sent back my album about the time spoken of in the text, with these lines addressed to myself:—

"'Tis not the dove-like softness of thine eyes
My pensive gaze that draws, however fair;
A holier charm within their beauty lies,
The unspotted soul, that's mirrored always there.

missed and asked for, and he could not revive or bring forward certain plays without my help. This was my only drop of comfort; for, despite the love and care of a dear friend who left her home to tend and watch over me, it was a weary time, this banishment—this separation from the art which was all in all to me; from which I had derived almost the only happiness in my hitherto rather lonely, little-cared-for life. I could not but see, too, that my friends did not expect I should grow better. I do not think I very much cared. By the very young I believe life is not highly prized. But oh, the inaction, the enforced care and thought for myself, the wearing cough by night, the sameness of the dreary days! Had my life not been just before so different, so full of work, of imaginative excitement, doubtless my spirits would not have sunk so low. Happily, the dreary winter and trying spring gave way at last to summer: summer and youth triumphed over my illness, and before another winter I was well again.

I have wandered far from my text. "Old memories, they cling, they cling!" But as my thoughts travel back to these well-remembered days, and the

"Manche liebe Schatten steigen auf,"

of which Goethe speaks, my pen runs on with a freedom which I feel sure your friendship will forgive. You see, with encouragement, how conceited and "self-imbued" I can become.

Now let me go back to Desdemona, as I dreamed of her in those days, and as I think of her still. As in the case of Ophelia and Portia, so also in hers; her mother had obviously been long dead before Shakespeare takes up the story. Desdemona only once alludes to her mother, and that is in her hour of deepest bewilderment and sorrow, when she simply says, "My mother had a maid called Barbara," whose lover had "proved mad, and did forsake her." Like Portia, Desdemona was a noble Venetian lady, but there was a whole world of

There every thought of thy young heart is seen,
Radiant and pure, by truth and genius given,
As, on the surface of the lake serene
Reflected, gleam the perfect lights of heaven." W. C. M.

difference between their homes and their bringing up. No proud indulgent father watched the training of Desdemona's youth, and studied the progress of her heart and mind. Absorbed in state affairs, he seems to have been at no pains to read his daughter's nature, to engage her affections or her confidence. Thus, a creature, loving, generous, imaginative, was thrown back upon herself, and left to dream over characters more noble, and lives more checkered with adventure, than any she could see or hear of in her father's luxurious home. Making so small a part of her father's life, and missing the love, or the display of it, which would have been so precious to her, she finds her happiness in dreams of worth more exalted than any she has known, but which she has heard and read of in the poets and romancers of her own and other times. Supreme mistress of her father's house, she receives his guests, dispenses his hospitalities; and, except that she has never felt the assurance of that father's love, she yet "hath felt no age nor known no sorrow," and is "a child to chiding."

Her father finds her obedient to his every wish, a most diligent mistress of his house affairs—"a maiden never bold"; of "spirit still and quiet." He never thinks of the depths that may lie under this unruffled surface—not only hidden from his sight, but unknown to his child herself. He has found her "opposite to marriage" with the "curled darlings" of Venice, who had solicited her. As these have never moved her quiet, because deep spirit, her love for what he imagines she feared to look on is, to his thinking, "against all rules of nature," and could only be brought about "by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks." The enchantment, the witchcraft with which love fills the heart, Brabantio has never felt. With him all must be magic which is not customary.

Shakespeare carefully shows, in Desdemona's address to the senate, how matters stood between her father and herself. "Do you perceive in all this noble company," he asks her, "where most you owe obedience?" Obedience, observe, not affection. And what is her reply? Not that of a shrinking, timid girl, but that of a thoughtful woman; one whose mind and heart went with her love, whose courage is as great and as high as she thinks

the object of her love is worthy—ready to meet the consequences, and above all, to transfer to her own shoulders from Othello's the blame of her abduction :—

“That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world : . . .
And to his honours and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.”

Of her father she says he is “the lord of duty.” To him she is bound for “life and education”; these teach her “how to respect” him. Just as he has not asked, so not a word does she say about love and affection towards him. He is silenced. She owns freely all she owes him for “life and education.” Up to the time of her marriage he is first; she owes and pays him all obedience, all respect :—

“But here's my husband ;
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord.”

From all we see of Desdemona's readiness to give more than is expected from her of love and service, even to those who had much slighter claims upon her, I cannot think she would have been wanting in these to her father, had he not chilled her girlhood's natural demonstrations of affection. There is a kind of proud frowardness in some natures which, as I have known, even while loving dearly, will yet hold aloof from, keep at a distance, the objects of their love. They claim as a right that which will not grow without care and fostering, without some responsive looks, some tender words.

It is hardly conceivable that Brabantio should not have been proud of his daughter, of whose beauty and fascination he must have heard all tongues speak in praise. What pains has not Shakespeare taken to tell us over and over again what this gracious creature was! As she moved among her father's guests in his palace halls, or flashed in her gondola along the canals of

Venice, what admiring eyes must have followed her! Of her serene grace and womanly gentleness Brabantio's words have informed us. Cassio, the gentleman and scholar of high blood and breeding, speaks of her as

"a maid
That paragons description and wild fame."

When she lands in Cyprus it is

"The riches of the ship is come on shore!"

High as Othello stands in his regard, yet she is above even him in excellence. She is "our great captain's captain." Though dead to belief in all human excellence, even Iago is not blind either to her virtue or her beauty. Although to Roderigo he calls her "a super-subtle Venetian," yet to Cassio he says, "She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested." But if she is such as this to the general eye, what is she to Othello's? To him she is "the cunning'st pattern of excelling nature. . . . The world hath not a sweeter creature." And then her sweet, womanly graces! "So delicate with her needle: an admirable musician: oh, she will sing the savageness out of a bear; of so high and plenteous wit and invention! . . . And then of so gentle a condition!" She is pictured to us, in short, as possessed of every quality which could lay hold of a hero's heart and bring joy into his home:—

"If Heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it!"

What imagination would not kindle at the images thus set before it! Who would be content to see in this exquisite woman, as so many do, only a pretty piece of yielding amiability!

As with Imogen, so with Desdemona, Shakespeare has, in the passages cited, and in many others throughout the play, taken infinite pains to show how these his favourite heroines excelled in every accomplishment—how the grace, the purity, the dignity of their minds gave added charm to the fascination of their beauty and their manners. And this woman, this "divine Des-

demonia," whose mind has been fed, as in those stirring times of war it was sure to be, with "tales of high emprise and chivalry," and whose heart is ready for the inspiring touch which was to kindle it, is placed by her father under the influence which was above all others likely to captivate her fancy—that of the great general, of Moorish but royal blood, whose name was in every mouth, on whose valour and generalship the state had leaned, and was leaning still, as its chief stay. Long before she saw Othello, Desdemona must have pictured to herself this remarkable man, about whose almost fabulous history the world's talk had been so loud, and whose valorous deeds were in every mouth. How dull must Brabantio have been when he so oft invited the great hero of the day to his house! If he found pleasure in "questioning" the story of Othello's life, how was it he did not cast a thought upon the still greater charm that story might have for his daughter's ear? Dull and blind indeed must the old man have been, not to see that the blunt soldier tells it "o'er and o'er," because of the sweet listener at his side; not to see how quickly, when called away by house affairs, she steals back, sinking quietly into her seat so as not to interrupt the tale. The tremor in Desdemona's manner, which her father mistook for fear, had quite another origin. She felt frightened, not at Othello, but at herself—at the novel, bewildering, absorbing feeling which, hour by hour, was overmastering her.

The rapt attention—the eager, tender eyes, often suffused with tears—when Othello spoke of "being taken by the insolent foe, and sold to slavery"—the parted lips and shortened breath,—if these were noted by Brabantio, it would seem he held them as of no more moment than if they had been called forth by some skilled *improvisatore*. The idea that his daughter's being could be moved, her heart touched, by this stranger to her race and country—this

"Extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and everywhere,"

as Roderigo calls him, whose complexion was like "the shadowed livery of the burnished sun"—had never crossed his mind. He would as soon have thought of her being attracted by her torch-

bearer or her gondolier, as by one whom he classes with "bond slaves and pagans."

This wide difference of feeling could not have existed, had there been any living sympathy between the father and his child. He would have foreseen the danger of exposing a girl dawning into womanhood, and of sensibilities so deep, to such an unusual fascination, and she would have turned to him when she found herself in danger of being overmastered by a feeling, the indulgence in which might wreck his peace or her own. But the father, who is only the "lord of duty," has established no claim upon her heart; and that heart, hitherto untouched, is stolen from her during these long interviews, insensibly but for ever.

We are not to think that all this happens suddenly. The father is not surprised into losing his child. If he has been deceived, it is by himself and not by her. Othello speaks of having "some nine moons wasted" away from the tented field. Many of these may have been passed in Venice. Much time, therefore, may have flitted happily away in these interrupted recitals, before Othello found "good means to draw" from Desdemona

"a prayer of earnest heart
That he would all his pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intently."

When the story has been told from first to last, she gives him for his "pains a world of sighs."

"'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful;
She wished she had not heard it. Yet she wished
That Heaven had made her such a man,"

so noble, so self-devoting, so grandly enduring—so altogether spotless and heroic. Here comes out the warrior spirit which I have ascribed to her—the power of kindling, of understanding and rising up to, heroic deeds. We feel, even apart from Othello's words and her own subsequent avowal, that "her heart's subdued even to the very quality" of her lord. Thenceforth she is his own, in war or peace, in life and death, for evermore. The accident of the difference in Othello's complexion,

which operates against him in other eyes, endears him to hers. It touches her generosity. "I saw Othello's visage in his mind;" and "to his honours and his valiant parts" she consecrates her soul and fortunes from that moment.

Thus, under his very eyes, was Brabantio's daughter wooed and won; for he does not venture to gainsay this, after Othello has delivered his "round unvarnished tale" to the Venetian Council. But his very blindness—indifference it could not be—must have shown the lovers the impossibility of gaining his consent to their union.

Therefore did the "maiden never bold" take courage to leave her father's home, and give herself in marriage to the Moor. She had also the true, quiet courage, when sent for to the senate-house, to appeal directly to the Duke, begging him to hear her story, and to let her find a "charter in his voice to assist her simpleness." When her "unfolding" is ended, there is but one feeling in the council—to "let her will have free way." The Duke, in bidding "good-night to every one," adds to Brabantio:—

"And, noble signior,
If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black."

The first senator says: "Adieu, brave Moor; use Desdemona well." Then does Brabantio let out the cold malignity of his natural disposition—the unforgiving cruelty which he keeps to the last, so that it may sting and wound more surely:

"Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
She has deceived her father, and may thee."

Othello responds, "My life upon her faith!"

How vain, how futile are these words! Desdemona never forgot them. But how was it with Othello? Although at the time cast aside, defied, yet they struck home as they were intended; and such a listener as Iago, intent, as we know beforehand, on revenge, and caring not by what means it was brought about, would eagerly seize the weapon Brabantio puts into his hands, which, adroitly wielded by this subtle fiend, leads on to the fearful climax—"the tragic loading" of Desdemona's bed!

These fatal words open up to his quick eye the whole devilish scheme on which the play turns, and he closes the scene saying—

“I have ’t. It is engender’d. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light!”

Well might Othello say, “My life upon her faith!” How valiantly has she—his few hours’ wife—stood by him before these haughty senators and her much-dreaded father! how surprised him with delight, begging, this delicately nurtured lady, to be allowed to share with him the hardships and perils of the impending campaign—to live with him in the “tented field”! Had she been one who loved her ease and pleasure, such an one as Iago describes Venetian women in general to have been, was she likely to make such a request? Who cannot see that this woman was of the true, heroic mould, fearless as she was gentle? At the time, her request appears to have gone to Othello’s heart—to have moved him to endless gratitude, as well it might. When they meet at Cyprus, the first words on his lips are, “O my fair warrior!” The phrase, doubtless, afterwards became a favourite one with them; and it is touching to find Desdemona using it after Othello’s to her incomprehensible frenzy concerning the handkerchief, when she rebukes herself for her momentary harsh thought of him:—

“Beshrew me much, Emilia,
I was, unhandsome warrior as I am,
Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;
But now I find I had suborn’d the witness,
And he’s indicted falsely.”

“My life upon her faith!” Yes, whatever these words were for Othello, they were ever dear to her, believing, as she does almost to the last, that her noble Moor’s love and trust were as absolute as her own. In this her very innocence, in her loyalty to her husband, and to his friend Michael Cassio, Iago finds the easy means to accomplish his fiendish purpose.

It is the highest tribute to Desdemona that she alone is unbeguiled by Iago’s subtlety. Othello, Roderigo, Cassio, Emilia, he plays upon them all—uses them, gets them within his fatal grasp—makes of them his tools or his dupes—leads them on blindly to their own undoing. Not so Desdemona.

“ Oh, she was innocent !
 And to be innocent is nature's wisdom !
 Oh, surer than suspicion's hundred eyes
 Is that fine sense, which to the pure in heart,
 By mere oppugnancy to their own goodness,
 Reveals the approach of evil ! ” ¹

Iago, conscious of this fine intuition, makes no attempt to deceive her. His victim she may be, but he feels she will never be his dupe. After the first meeting in Cyprus, he appears never to have come into contact with her until she sends for him, to see if he can throw light upon the unaccountable change that has come over her husband. Had he dared to approach her with the faintest suggestion that Othello was untrue, she would have treated him as Nina Sforza, another noble Venetian lady, treated a similar traducer in Zouch Troughton's fine modern tragedy which bears her name :—

“ My Doria false !
 Oh, I could strike thee, liar ! ”

Except to illustrate the truth that no man knows himself, I marvel why Shakespeare makes Othello speak of himself as “not easily jealous.” It seems to me that the spark scarcely touches the tinder before it is aflame. A few words dropped by the tempter take hold of him even when his happiness is at the fullest—when he has just parted from Desdemona in a transport of content, which finds vent in the words—

“ Excellent wretch ! Perdition catch my soul,
 But I do love thee ! And when I love thee not,
 Chaos is come again.”

Chaos *has* come ! An artfully muttered “ Indeed ! ” a question about Cassio's previous acquaintance with his wife, and his suspicion is at once aroused. Othello insists upon knowing Iago's “ thinkings,” on wringing from him the meanings of his “ stops,” gives admission at once to the idea that he may be wronged ; and when Iago, by way of seeming warning, bids him beware of “ jealousy,” you see from his agonised exclamation, “ O misery ! ” that the word has sunk into the very depths of his being. All the

¹ Coleridge's *Zapolya*, Act iv. sc. 1.

love, all the devoted self-sacrifice of Desdemona, all sense of what is due to her and to himself, are forgotten. He suffers Iago to remind him of her father's parting words, and so to pour his envenomed slime upon this fair creature, to whom he owes so much, that her name and fame can never again in life show fair in his eyes:—

“She's gone ; I am abused, and my relief
Must be to loathe her.”

And thus, because of the foul words, the vile suggestion of this base Machiavellian trickster, the life of these two noble beings is turned from paradise into hell, and there is no more peace nor joy for either of them.

Othello is right, when he says of Iago that he

“Knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings.”

But that he should think him “honest,” this is the marvel. Nor less marvel is it that, knowing him to be but a “rough soldier,” and, as Iago says of himself, by nature apt “to spy into abuses,” and to “shape things that are not,” Othello can allow him even in words and distantly to approach the sanctuary of his wife's virtue. Men, as we know, may possess all manly gifts and be fairly decorous and moral in their conduct, yet, through some defect of nature or of training, or of both, may be quite incapable of conceiving the noblest qualities of womanhood. To understand these there must be some sympathy, some affinity. Therefore Iago might be in a sense “honest,” yet totally unfit to speak or be listened to on such a subject. Had Othello been really the “noble Moor,” as “true of mind” as Desdemona thought him, he would, at the lightest aspersion of his wife, have recoiled from Iago as from a serpent. He would have crushed the insolent traducer and his vile suggestions beneath his heel in bitterest contempt.

“Not easily jealous !” Of all men, Othello had cause not to be jealous. Capable as he had proved himself of admiring Desdemona's trustful, reverential love, of appreciating her graceful, playful fondness—new as it was to him, and touching, as it did, chords which had never vibrated during a life spent hitherto

among men in the rough scenes of war, his senses fascinated by her beauty, as his mind was by her purity and sympathy—how could he fall away from his allegiance so soon? Was such a woman as Desdemona likely to become untrue because he had not a fair skin or silky manners? “She had eyes, and chose me!” Or why should he think he had been displaced in her affections by Cassio? Cassio was obviously an older friend of Desdemona than himself—a welcome visitor at Brabantio’s house; for in their wooing he “went between them very oft.” He makes no secret of his admiration of Desdemona; and we may be sure that, had she shown him the slightest favour, he would have been among her suitors. But no. All his advantages of person, of mind and manners, had given him no hold upon her fancy. His best recommendation to her had been that he was ever eloquent in Othello’s praise:—

“What! Michael Cassio,
That came a-wooing with you, and many a time,
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
Hath ta’en your part!”

As if she had ever spoken of him dispraisingly!—except, perhaps, for the pleasure of having her ears filled with his praises by one who “had known him long.” Yet not a thought of this familiar story crosses Othello’s mind; he leaps at once to the conclusion that both the tired friend and the wife who had forsworn for his sake “country, credit, everything,” were false to him. And this he does upon the mere suggestion of a villain whom he absurdly believes to be “of exceeding honesty.” Truly had Iago gauged him when he said—

“The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are!”

But Iago could neither see nor feel that Othello’s nature, free and open as it might be, lacked that true nobility which, being itself incapable of baseness, is resolutely closed to innuendoes against those it loves. Alas the while! But for this fatal defect, how could Othello have fallen so easy a prey to his malignant tempter?

How could he have come so readily to believe that he had been "discarded thence," where, as he says, he had "garnered up his heart"—

"Where either I must live, or bear no life ;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up" !

We feel with him when he exclaims, "Oh, the pity of it, the pity of it !" but we feel, too, that had he but possessed some of Desdemona's loyalty, some grains of common-sense, all Iago's snares might have been set for him in vain.

For, after all, Iago, as I have said, seems to me but a poor trickster at the best. He acts from the basest motives, and works by artifices the shallowest as well as the most vile—artifices liable to be upset at any moment by the merest casualty. He hates Othello mortally for having, as he thinks, unfairly kept him out of his lieutenancy. If Othello erred in this, his injustice is paid for by a fearful penalty. Iago's jealousy of Othello with his own wife is but one of those conscious sacrifices to what he himself calls the "divinity of hell," to which he resorts as juggles with his conscience. He hates Cassio for the same cause, and for supplanting him in his office. He hates his wife, as such creatures hate the wives that have "outlived their liking." He is brutish in mind as, when he dare be, he is in manners, and he is as sordid as he is vindictive—using Roderigo, that "poor trash of Venice," as a sponge to squeeze ducats from. Above all, he hates Desdemona, because she is impervious to his arts. Cunning as he is, yet he is in hourly terror that the net he has woven to ensnare others may enmesh himself. One word of frank explanation between Othello and Desdemona, a whisper from Emilia that the handkerchief was given by herself to her husband, a hint from Roderigo to Desdemona of the lies with which Iago has fooled him, and all his fine-spun web would have fallen to pieces before, as it does fall in the end. He knows this well, and sees no way of escape but in the murder of his dupes. Roderigo and Cassio must be "removed," and the Moor goaded on to murder his wife. To murder her—and how? Othello would have made her death swift and

easy by poison. But this is not torture enough to satisfy Iago. "Strangle her in her bed—even the bed she has contaminated!" When we think of all that has gone before—when, with this suggestion still recent on his lips, we see him afterwards by the side of Desdemona, summoned by her in her trouble, as her "good friend," we feel inclined to echo his own words: "There is no such man; it is impossible."

Iago has wit enough to see some of the good qualities of his victims, and, judging of other men by himself—for he knows no other standard—he acts with full reliance on the vices and the weaknesses of mankind. But he has not wit enough to see that he is playing a game which he must lose in the end, for all the odds are against the chance of his victims being swept away so completely that his villany can never come to light. I see no grandeur in a "demi-devil" of this type; and I think the judgment misplaced which can find it in his expressed determination to answer no questions, even upon the rack. He had already said too much in his garrulous boast of having tricked his victims by dropping Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's chamber. A cleverer villain would have held his peace. Woful indeed it is, that a creature so despicable should have had the power to hurt Othello's mind past curing, to drag it down into the very mire—that he should have made him think base thoughts, and stain his soul so deeply that no years of penitential grief could ever have washed it clean again. History has not on record such another inhuman villain. In my young dreams I never could quite decide into which of the circles of the Inferno he should be cast; even the worst seemed too good for him.

Is not my view of both Othello and Iago borne out by the brief, sad story, that rushes on so swiftly to its ghastly climax? We see little of the blissful life which Othello and Desdemona lived after their happy union as married lovers at Cyprus. After all his terrors for her safety, that he should find Desdemona happily landed there before him is a relief and a joy past all expressing. With a foreboding of evil he fears that

"not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."

Troubles indeed begin early to press upon them. Cassio, their friend, endeared to them by the closest ties, so unaccountably forgets himself that his general has at once to strip him of his lieutenancy. This must be a great sorrow to them both. Still, the rent is not irreparable; and we learn that Othello would have been glad of a fair excuse to reinstate his friend. When Desdemona first speaks for Cassio, we see that she knew Othello's mind. He pretends—but only pretends—to be absorbed in other matters, for the pleasure of hearing her plead as a petitioner. He puts her off only to hear her urge her suit again:—

“ Good my lord,
If I have any grace or power to move you,
His present reconciliation take;
For, if he be not one that truly loves you,
That errs in ignorance and not in cunning,
I have no judgment in an honest face.

. . . Good love, call him back.

Oth. Not now, sweet Desdemona; some other time.

Des. But shall't be shortly?

Oth. The sooner, sweet, for you.

Des. Shall't be to-night at supper?

Oth. No, not to-night.

Des. To-morrow dinner, then?

Oth. I shall not dine at home.

Des. Why, then, to-morrow night, or Tuesday morn;
Or Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn:
I prithee, name the time; but let it not
Exceed three days; in faith he's penitent.

. . . I wonder in my soul

What you would ask me, that I should deny,
Or stand so mammering on. What! Michael Cassio,
That came a-wooing with you," &c.

When Othello sees that Desdemona is hurt at his silence, he breaks in with—

“ Prithee, no more: let him come when he will;
I will deny thee nothing.”

But she thinks this so small a favour to be granted to a friend who had done so much for them, that she will hardly accept it as such. The “great captain's captain” will not have it called a “boon.” 'Tis only so slight a service as she would “entreat him wear his gloves, or feed on nourishing dishes”:

“Nay, when I have a suit
Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise and difficulty,
And fearful to be granted.”

He repeats his former words :—

“I will deny thee nothing ;
Whereon, I do beseech thee, grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself.”

How sweet is her rejoinder !—

“Shall I deny you ? no : farewell, my lord.”

He replies :—

“Farewell, my Desdemona : I’ll come to thee straight ”—

which draws from her the winning assurance of her full faith in him :—

“Be as your fancies teach you ;
Whate’er you be, I am obedient.”

And at this point ends the happiness, which is as perfect now as it well could be.

In the meantime, and while the adder’s tongue is busy at its work, arrive the leading personages in Cyprus invited by Othello to a banquet. Desdemona receives them, and plays the part of gracious hostess, so natural to her. To her surprise Othello, who said he would “come to her straight,” does not appear. She fears his guests will think him discourteous in this prolonged absence, and hastens to remind him of their visitors. She enters gaily, ready with a pretty chiding :

“How now, my dear Othello !
Your dinner, and the generous islanders
By you invited, do attend your presence.
Oth. I am to blame.”

The coldness and reserve of his speech startle her :—

“Why do you speak so faintly ? Are you not well ?
Oth. I have a pain upon my forehead here.
Des. Faith, that’s with watching ; ’twill away again :
Let me but bind it hard, within this hour
It will be well.
Oth. Your napkin is too little ;
Let it alone.”

The harsh abruptness shown in this reply to her offer to relieve his pain must have come indeed as a shock to Desdemona, contrasting strangely as it did with the tone of their parting so short a time before. Yet she sweetly adds, without noticing his rudeness :—

“I am very sorry that you are not well.”

No wonder, finding things so changed, and with no apparent cause, that she forgets the handkerchief, dear as it was to her, with which she had offered to bind his forehead. She is “a child to chiding,” and no doubt feels these first harsh words very keenly. They go out together, and we may suppose that her frank innocent demeanour and fond words reassure him for the time. I remember so well Mr Macready's manner as we left the scene. He took my face in both his hands, looked long into my eyes, and then the old look came back into his, and it spoke as plainly as possible, “My life upon her faith !”

What happens at the banquet we are not told. It cannot be the presence of Cassio which inflames Othello, for, being in disgrace, he would hardly be there. It may be that the free, loyal homage which he sees paid to his wife, not only because of her position as his wife, but still more on account of her beauty and sweet courtesy to his guests, makes her still more precious in his eyes, so that the bare thought of not standing alone in her affections maddens him. But certainly he returns shortly after in a paroxysm of rage and grief, and salutes Iago with “Avaunt ! begone ! thou hast set me on the rack.” Then follows that exquisite speech in which he bids farewell to everything in life most dear—to “the tranquil mind !”—to “content !”—to all “pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war.”

“Farewell ! Othello's occupation's gone !”

To direct the fury of Othello's “waked wrath” into the desired channel, Iago has ready a whole catalogue of reasons to prove Desdemona and Cassio's disloyalty. Othello accepts them readily, as though they were “proofs of Holy Writ” :—

“Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago ;
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
'Tis gone. . . . Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues !”

These "aspics' tongues" have been hissing out their venom to deadly purpose. These are the drugs which Iago uses, and to which he again appeals:—

"Work on—

My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught."

Desdemona has made so sure of winning Othello's consent to receive Cassio into favour again, that she sends for him to tell him the good news: "Tell him I have moved my lord on his behalf, and hope all will be well." But before they meet occurs the scene with the handkerchief, and Othello's violence at the supposed loss of it. Still Desdemona, who knows nothing of its whereabouts, but believing it to be only mislaid, and hoping to have it to show him when it has been properly searched for, thinks his vehemence on the subject a little overstrained—put upon her, indeed, "as a trick to drive her from her suit." Therefore she still repeats it, urging Cassio's claims upon him with the words—

"You'll never meet a more sufficient man.

.

A man that, all his time,
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love;
Shared dangers with you."

It is only when Othello breaks angrily from her that she realises there may be "some wonder in this handkerchief: I am most unhappy in the loss of it."

Emilia, instead of being, as her husband fancies, inclined favourably towards Othello, appears to me to have the dislike, common to many of her class, of anything unusual, and looks all along upon the Moor with unfriendly, suspicious eyes. So she says,

"'Tis not a year or two shows us a man."

She no doubt had found it to be so: even Iago must have appeared to her in different colours when they were first wedded. Her pent-up dislike to the Moor adds fuel to her wrath, when she finds subsequently that he has been the easy dupe of her villanous husband.

After the episode of the handkerchief, when Cassio appears,

who had been sent for by Desdemona to hear, as she hoped, good news, Desdemona, ever unselfish, is as sorry for him as for herself :—

“ Alas, thrice-gentle Cassio !
My advocacy is not now in tune ;
My lord is not my lord ; nor should I know him,
Were he in favour as in humour alter'd.”

She remembers that she has pledged herself to be his “solicitor” even to the death,—

“ You must awhile be patient :
What I can do I will ; and more I will
Than for myself I dare : let that suffice you.”

Cassio will surely think of this hereafter !

¶ The next time we see Desdemona she comes with Lodovico, who has been sent to Cyprus from Venice, bearing to Othello the Duke's letters and commands. Desdemona salutes Lodovico as “cousin.” He may be so, or this may be only a phrase of courtesy in the same way that royalty uses it. When speaking of him afterwards to Emilia, she says, “This Lodovico is a proper man.” “A very handsome man,” says Emilia. Desdemona replies, “He speaks well.” See the difference in the women—how finely marked in these comments ! While Othello reads his papers, Lodovico inquires after his friend, Lieutenant Cassio. Upon this Desdemona, who never loses sight of her promise, says : “Cousin, there's fallen between him and my lord an unkind breach ;” and, beginning to fear that her own influence will not be sufficient, she adds, “But you shall make all well.” “Is there division,” Lodovico says, with evident surprise, “'twixt my lord and Cassio ?”

“ A most unhappy one : I would do much
To atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio.”

This public declaration of her goodwill—which appears, what in truth it is, nothing to those around but simply the natural feeling for a friend in trouble—all but maddens Othello ; and when Desdemona expresses her gladness that they are commanded home, and that Cassio is to be governor of Cyprus in his place, Othello breaks out, “I am glad to see you *mad*,” and strikes her.

“My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,
Though I should swear I saw't : 'tis very much :
Make her amends ; she weeps.”

Her tears, Othello says, are but those of a crocodile. To his fiercer injunction, “Out of my sight!” her only answer is, “I will not stay to offend you.” Then upon Lodovico's request she is called back, and comes upon the instant, true to her former words—“Whate'er you be, I am obedient.” Untouched by her gentleness, Othello continues :—

“Proceed you in your tears.
Concerning this, sir,—O well-painted passion !—
. . . . Get you away ;
I'll send for you anon. . . . Hence, avaunt !”

No wonder that Lodovico, when Othello quits the scene, exclaims in amazement :—

“Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all-in-all sufficient ? This the nature
Whom passion could not shake ? . . .
Are his wits safe ? Is he not light of brain ?
. . . .
What ! strike his wife !”

Iago prepares Lodovico for what he knows is to follow, by replying : “Would I knew that stroke would prove the worst !” “I am sorry that I am deceived in him,” is Lodovico's answer. He will no doubt remember afterwards that he has been deceived in more than in Othello.

Next come the Moor's interrogations of Emilia, and her replies :—

“I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
Lay down my soul at stake : . . .
For, if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
There's no man happy.”

But she may as well speak to the winds. If Othello had spoken here of having seen the handkerchief in Cassio's hand, I believe, despite the terror of her husband, Emilia would have explained how she had herself found and given it to Iago ; but he does not. He sends her to fetch Desdemona, and then rudely dismisses her.

The poor dove is now in the falcon's grasp, but not quite yet to be torn to pieces. One wonders why Othello sends for her, for he will believe nothing she says or swears:—

Oth. Swear thou art honest.

Des. Heaven doth truly know it.

Oth. Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell!

Des. To whom, my lord? With whom? How am I false?

Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?

Oth. What committed!

I should make very forges of my cheeks,

That would to cinders burn up modesty,

Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed!

Des. By Heaven, you do me wrong!"

When in the coarsest terms he asks her if she is not unfaithful, she exclaims: "No, as I am a Christian. . . . No, as I shall be saved!"

Emilia finds her on the floor, to which she has sunk after making oath, on her knees, of her being to Othello "a true and loyal wife." Think how stunned and bewildered she must be! She is accused of a crime beyond all others most foreign to her nature. She can imagine no motive for the accusation—has no clue to the "With whom? How am I false?" It is like a hideous dream; and, with a pathos unsurpassed, to my thinking, in poetry, she answers Emilia's question, "How do you, my good lady?" with—

"Faith, half asleep.

Emil. Good madam, what's the matter with my lord?

Des. Who is thy lord?

Emil. He that is yours, sweet lady.

Des. I have none: do not talk to me, Emilia; I cannot weep. . . .

. . . Prithee to-night

Lay on my bed my wedding-sheets—remember;

And call thy husband hither."

Then follows that most pathetic scene, in which she so touchingly appeals for help to her destroyer, and asks, "Am I that name, Iago?" "What name, fair lady?" Not being able to utter the foul word herself, she answers:—

"Such as she says my lord did say I was.

O good Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him."

She fears that in his anger he may shake her off "to beggarly divorcement." Yet as she ever did, so she ever will, "love him dearly."

"Unkindness may do much;
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love."

She has to put up with the cold comfort which Iago gives—pretending to know nothing:—

"I pray you, be content; 'tis but his humour:
The business of the state does him offence,
And he does chide with you."

At this she catches with trembling eagerness:—

"If 'twere no other—
Iago. 'Tis but so, I warrant.
Go in, and weep not; all things shall be well."

How sad it is that the exigencies of our stage require the omission of the exquisite scene which follows (Act iv. sc. 3) in the anteroom to Desdemona's bedchamber—a scene so important for the development of her character, and affording such fine opportunity for the highest powers of pathos in the actress!¹ Othello, says Emilia, "looks gentler"; but he has commanded her to be dismissed. "Dismiss me!" "So he

¹ I never saw this scene acted but once, and that was in Dresden. Certainly the Germans prove their high admiration and respect for our great poet. They give his plays in their integrity, never dreaming of cutting out the very scenes that are most necessary for the development of plot and character. Their scenery is good, appropriate, harmonious—and stands, as it always should, in subservience to the plot and human interest in the play: it is so unostentatiously good that you never think of it. So of the costumes: you think you see the persons represented. As all is in keeping, so you never criticise what the characters wear. You feel at once, they looked or did not look as they should, and give this subject no further heed. All these matters are deeply studied, but not so much talked about as they

says." "I would you had never seen him!" "So would not I," Desdemona rejoins:—

"My love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—
Prithee, unpin me,—have grace and favour in them."

She had before, when most unhappy, bidden Emilia lay her wedding-sheets that night upon her bed. Emilia now tells her she has done so. She replies—

"All's one. Good faith, how foolish are our minds!
If I do die before thee, prithee, shroud me
In one of those same sheets"—

little thinking how soon that shroud would be required. In what follows, what might not be done by that silent acting—that eloquence not of words but of look and gesture—which is the great test of the actor's powers! While Emilia is "unpinning" her mistress, I picture to myself Desdemona seated, her sad thoughts wandering far away, gently taking the jewels from her throat, her ears, her fingers; while Emilia uncoils the pearls from her hair, untwists its long plaits, and gathers them for the night in a loose coil at the back of her head. Then, as Emilia kneels at her feet to unfasten the embroidered shoes, Desdemona may put her hand admiringly on Emilia's head and smooth her fine hair. Meanwhile her thoughts are travelling back to her childhood—perhaps to that mother whose caresses she so early lost and missed, for she had known but few from her cold father: in imagination she may again feel them. Then she remembers Barbara, her mother's maid, who loved and was

are here. Being but accessories at the best, they are very properly only treated as such.

I feel very grateful for the draped curtain which in Germany drops down from the sides after a scene—a usage which is now adopted in some of our leading theatres. While it is closed, such furniture as has been necessary for the scene is quietly withdrawn (no sofas pushed on and pulled off by very visible ropes)—and the next scene appears, on the withdrawal of the curtain, quite complete. In this way one of the great difficulties in presenting Shakespeare's plays, arising from the frequent changes of the scene, is got over. In Germany, a play of Shakespeare takes a whole long evening; and the Germans will sit four or five hours, listening patiently and delightedly to all he has to teach them.

forsaken, and who died singing the sad old ditty that “expressed her fortune”—an incident likely to stamp itself deeply in Desdemona’s memory. Little had she thought it was to be her death-song too!—

“That song to-night
Will not go from my mind. I have much to do,
But to go hang my head all at one side,
And sing it like poor Barbara. . . .

“(Sings) ‘The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore-tree,
Sing all a green willow;
. . . .
Her salt tears fell from her, and soften’d the stones’;
Lay by these:—
‘Sing willow, willow, willow;
Prithee, hie thee; he’ll come anon: . . .
‘Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve’—
Nay, that’s not next. Hark! who is’t that knocks?
Emil. It is the wind.
Des. ‘I call’d my love false love; but what said he then?
Sing willow, willow, willow.’
. . . .
. . . . Good night. Mine eyes do itch;
Doth that bode weeping?
Emil. ’Tis neither here nor there.
Des. I have heard it said so. . . .
Dost thou in conscience think,—tell me, Emilia,—
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?
Emil. There be some such, no question.
. . . .
Des. Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong
For the whole world.
. . . .
I do not think there is any such woman.”

After listening to some of Emilia’s coarse worldly maxims, she breaks away from the subject by saying—

“Good night, good night: Heaven me such uses send
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!”

Although such heavy clouds had passed over her happiness, yet Desdemona still loved and trusted, and was not, therefore, altogether sad. To the last she shows herself to be of a hopeful, generous disposition. She knows how to forgive—hopes that

what has been the mystery of Othello's unkindness is perhaps to be explained in the privacy of their chamber, when a word of regret, of remorse from him, will win her fullest pardon. There is something almost sublime in this unshaken love and trust. She falls asleep in it—for oh, such a rude awakening! The swan had sung her song, and so sinks into her deathbed, although she knew it not.

It is, as we have seen, with some presentiment of sorrow before her that Desdemona goes to bed. The shock of Othello's accusation has struck to her soul, and shaken her whole being. She will not accuse or hear him accused of injustice by Emilia, but her idol cannot stand in her imagination where he did. He has human infirmities, and these far greater than she could have looked for. She can think of no indiscretion of her own, except perhaps suing for their friend Cassio, at a time when Othello was not in a mood to listen—when state affairs disturbed him. Yet how could he, for so slight a cause, strike her—disgrace himself and her before the gentleman who came with despatches from Venice, and afterwards shock her ears with names not to be uttered!—and

“Throw such despite and heavy terms upon her,
As true hearts cannot bear!”

Is this her noble Moor, “so true of mind, and made of no such baseness as jealous creatures are”?

Sad, disappointed as she is at his unkindness, yet her conscience is at rest. Besides, the fit seemed past: he had “looked gentler”; so, trying for more hopeful thoughts, and praying for the help she needed—worn out, too, as she was by unusual and unexpected trouble—she falls asleep.

It is strange it never occurs to Othello that, if Desdemona had really been the “cunning” Venetian he thought her, knowing her vileness discovered, she might have found means easily to bribe those who would have hidden her from his just wrath. Emilia was not so scrupulous a woman as to have refused her assistance. Besides, had not the Moor insulted her, also, in the grossest language? And would she not have been, at a word from her mistress, glad enough to help her, and thwart him?

But he sees this cunning, past all expressing "vile one" obey his will without a murmur, go quietly to bed, and finds her, with this load of guilt, as he believes, upon her heart, sleeping the sweet sleep of a child. Well may Emilia exclaim of him, "O gull! O dolt!" He sees nothing but what he is primed to see; in all things else "as ignorant as dirt." He may have "looked gentler," but the poison has done its work; and nothing but the life's blood of his victim can, as he says, "remove or choke the strong conception which I do groan withal." The very serenity of her guileless soul makes against her. "She must die, or she'll betray more men." What a scene is this! The powers of good and evil have met in mortal strife!

My friends used to say, as Mr Macready did, that in Desdemona I was "very hard to kill." How could it be otherwise? I *would not* die dishonoured in Othello's esteem. This was bitterer than fifty thousand deaths. Then I thought of all his after-suffering, when he should come to know how he had mistaken me! The agony for him which filled my heart, as well as the mortal agony of death, which I felt in imagination, made my cries and struggles no doubt very vehement and very real. My whole soul was flung into the entreaty, but for "half an hour!" "but while I say one prayer!"—which prayer would have been for *him*. Then, when she hears, for the first time, that Cassio is the supposed accomplice in her guilt, it was as though I spoke for myself in uttering the swift rejoinder—"Send for the man and ask him!"¹

Oh that Othello had been so true a friend and husband as to do this before! But no: the poison still works, and all she says only serves to augment his fury. When Desdemona hears that Cassio has already lost his life, and that "his mouth is stopped," she naturally weeps for the loss of the innocent man,

¹ It was a great pleasure to me, when, talking with Mr Carlyle in 1873 about Mr Macready's revivals, which he spoke of very warmly, he referred in glowing terms to my Desdemona. Amid much else, he said he had never felt the play so deeply before. One phrase especially struck me—"It quite hurt me to see the fair, delicate creature so brutally used." Would that I could give an idea of his tone and accent, gentle and tremulous, as if a suffering living creature were there before him! I quote from my Diary, November 24, 1873.

both for his own sake and because he alone could, she thinks, prove her guiltless. All things conspire against her—her very tears, her prayers, her asseverations give countenance to her guilt. She is hurled headlong down the precipice, but, alas! not killed at once. The strong young life *will* not leave its tenement—the mortal agony is prolonged—even the dagger's thrust, which is meant in mercy that she may not "linger in her pain," is not enough. The soul *cannot* away until it asserts the purity of the sweet casket in which it has been set. It lingers on in its pain until the poor lips can speak, not, as before, to deaf ears that will not listen, but to those of a sympathising woman. Then, with bitter moans and broken breath, Desdemona stammers out with her last gasp of life—"A guiltless death I die!"

When asked by Emilia who has done this deed, she says, "Nobody; I myself." As in the senate-house, before the council, she took all the blame upon herself, so here again, and with her dying breath, she exonerates the Moor. I did it all—"I myself." Blame no one else. "Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell!"

Commend *me* to my brave warrior! Of what higher heroism than this—of what nobler love and self-abnegation—has history or romance any record?

Mr Macready was very fine in this scene. There was an impressive grandeur, an elevation even, in his ravings:—

"Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!—
O Desdemona! Desdemona!—dead! dead! dead!"

As I lay there and listened, he seemed to me to be like a soul in hell, whirling in the second circle of the Inferno. And there was a piteousness, a pathos, in his reiteration of the loved one's name that went to my very heart. Then one felt how wisely Shakespeare had made its penultimate syllable long, and not short, as in Italy it is, bringing into it a prolonged moaning sound, which at this point of the play seems so much in accord with Desdemona's doom. Oh, how my heart ached, too, for

Othello, when his eyes were opened, and he could see and trace the paltry threads by which his soul and body had been ensnared, and when I heard the broken accents of his shame at having sunk so low as to conspire in Cassio's death!

Lod. Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?

Oth. Ay.

Cas. Dear general, I never gave you cause.

Oth. I do believe it, and I ask you pardon."

And now the end has come. The play begins in night with hurry and turmoil; in night, and what a night, it closes! There are glorious days of perfect happiness between, but they are few, and the last of them overshadowed with clouds "consulting for foul weather," and giving portentous presage of a terrible catastrophe. But not with storm and turmoil does the last night come. The deep blue sky is studded with "chaste stars," not a breath is stirring, and the lapping of the Levantine sea against the castle rock is alone heard through the stillness; while "the sweetest innocent that e'er did lift up eye" is cruelly done to death by him that loved her best.

As we "look upon the tragic loading of that bed," we are not without comfort. Truly it is best so. The wrench which had been given to the bond by which these two noble lovers were united could never be repaired on earth. Life could never again have been to them the same as in their brief days of happiness. The delusion which made Othello mad has been rent from his eyes. He must rejoin her who died with a message for him on her lips. No fear that when they "meet at compt" her look will "hurl his soul from heaven." Her infinite love and pity will think but of his sufferings, and will plead for the forgiveness he dares not ask for himself.

Another victim lies near them, and one who has become almost hallowed by her death.

Whatever may have been Emilia's life before, we must feel for her now. She has truly loved and honoured Desdemona, all the more that, to her common nature, and with her rough experience of the world, her mistress reveals a purity and elevation of spirit which she had never met before—nay, of which she had never so much as dreamed. We cannot forgive the part she plays in

giving the dropped handkerchief to her husband, instead of returning it to her lady, knowing how she values it—how she keeps it “always by her to kiss and talk to.” Although she has misgivings as to the use her husband means to make of it, yet she gives it to “please his fantasy.” She hears Desdemona deplore its loss—“Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?” Yet she can answer, “I know not, madam.” She hears the Moor’s wild burst of passion when Desdemona owns she “has it not about her”; she knows that its absence has made him jealous; she sees her mistress plunged in grief for its loss, and yet keeps silence. Nothing can excuse that silence, not even her dread of her husband, brutal as she knew him to be—this “honest, honest Iago”! *She* could have told them of what metal he was made.

Still she expiates her wrong-doing with her life. With that last interview of only an hour ago in her thoughts, the old ballad still sounding in her ears, when she next sees her sweet mistress it is to find her breathless—dying from a violent and most unnatural death. Well may she say, “Oh, this grief will kill me!” But she has yet to learn the share which she herself has had in this dismal tragedy—to learn that the handkerchief she stole and gave to her husband, Desdemona had been accused of giving to Cassio. At last she speaks. Though late, she will make what reparation she can, and she does it unflinchingly. Her husband’s threats and his commands that she shall go home do not stop her. She entreats of the others leave to speak. “’Tis proper I obey him, but not now. Perchance, Iago, I will ne’er go home.” No! there is no more home for any of them. What has she more to live for? Better die, as she does, by Iago’s sword, than drag out a life of remorse for disloyalty to her mistress. That mistress is the one sole creature of whom she can now think, and with her dying breath she reiterates to Othello the asseverations of her innocence. “She loved thee, cruel Moor; . . . so speaking as I think, I die, I die;” and her last words are a prayer that she may be laid by her mistress’s side.

We have learned from Gratiano that Brabantio is dead. No doubt when he returned from the ducal palace to his desolate home, Brabantio would become alive to the truth that his

daughter had been its very light and life. Self-reproaches would rise to fill her place and embitter his loneliness, reminding him of all he might have been to her, but had not been. The maiden, so tender, so unobtrusive, had a magic in her presence not consciously known or felt until lost, which filled his home and life with blessings, and without which the charm of both was gone, and so the old senator died quickly—"pure grief shore his old thread in twain."

Of Cassio what shall be said? The two creatures he most admired and loved have been brought to ruin, and chiefly through him! By his own folly in the brawl with Roderigo he will be apt to think he laid the groundwork for Iago's plot. He will remember that it was Iago who first urged him to appeal to Desdemona to get him reinstated. Nor can he fail to learn how his importunity and her kindness—"Your solicitor shall rather die than give your cause away!"—helped to bring about the woful catastrophe. If so, what unhappiness is before him! It will take long years to deaden the thought that, but for his fatal weakness, no intercession would have been necessary, and thus all would have gone well. A great gap has been made in his life. He will never be the same man again, though he may be a better and a wiser one. Neither Cyprus nor Venice will hold him long. He will get back, I think, to Florence, and to the books and studies of his youth. Ever present with him will be the image of the victims of the "misadventured piteous overthrow" in which he had unwittingly played so prominent a part. But for him there will be one "enskyed and sainted" above all her sex—one who will keep alive for him his faith in woman, his hopes of the hereafter, when the mysteries of "all this unintelligible world" shall be solved; and that one will be—"the divine Desdemona."

Adieu, my friend. I have told you, as you wished me, my thoughts about the three important female characters in Shakespeare to which you believed the least justice had generally been done. Would I had held your pen to write with! Adieu!

Ever affectionately yours,

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

To Miss GERALDINE E. JEWSBURY.

[Before this letter was despatched, I learned that the dear friend for whom it was intended had sunk into a state of unconsciousness. As it was written, however, so I leave it, praying forbearance for what in it is merely personal—the trifles which would have given it a special value in her eyes.

H. F. M.

31 ONSLOW SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.,
February 12, 1881.]

IV.

J U L I E T

[illegible]

IV.
JULIET.

31 ONSLOW SQUARE, 5th January 1881.

“So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o’er her fellows shows.”

YOU ask me to write to you, dear friend, of Juliet, and of all my earliest dreams about her. Whose bidding should I heed, if not yours, my always loving, indulgent, constant friend? But indeed you hardly realise how difficult is the task you have set me. Of the characters which I wrote about to our dear Miss Jewsbury, I could speak as of beings outside, as it were, my own personality; but Juliet seems inwoven with my life. Of all characters, hers is the one which I have found the greatest difficulty, but also the greatest delight, in acting. My early girlhood’s first step upon the stage was made as Juliet. To the last days of my artist life I never acted the character without finding fresh cause to marvel at the genius which created this child-woman, raised by love to heroism of the highest type.

It was at the little theatre beside the Green at Richmond¹ that I first played Juliet; and Richmond is therefore indelibly associated with the Juliet of my early youth. I will tell you

¹ As these sheets are passing through the press (March 1885), I read, not without a pang, that this little theatre, after sinking into a state of pitiable decay, is being pulled down.

why. My holidays were passed there, for there my family always spent the summer months. The small house on the Green, in which we were often left with a kind old servant in charge, looks to me even now like a home. Every step of the Green, the river-banks, the fields round Sion House, the Hill, the Park, the Twickenham Meadows, were all loved more and more as each summer enlarged my sense of beauty. One of my earliest and most vivid recollections—I was then quite a child—was a meeting with “the great Edmund Kean,” as my sister called him. He was her pet hero. She had seen him act, and, through friends, had a slight acquaintance with him. Wishing her little “birdie,” as she called me, to share all her pleasures, she often took me with her to the Green for the chance of seeing him, as he strolled there with his aunt, old Miss Tidswell. The great man had been very ill, so that our expectations had been frequently disappointed. At last, about noon one very warm sunny day, my sister’s eager eyes saw the two figures in the far distance. It would have been bad manners to appear to be watching, so in a roundabout way our approach was made. As we drew near, I would gladly have run away. I was startled, frightened at what I saw,—a small pale man with a fur cap, and wrapped in a fur cloak. He looked to me as if come from the grave. A stray lock of very dark hair crossed his forehead, under which shone eyes which looked dark, and yet bright as lamps. So large were they, so piercing, so absorbing, I could see no other feature. I shrank from them behind my sister, but she whispered to me that it would be unkind to show any fear, so we approached, and were kindly greeted by the pair.

Oh what a voice was that which spoke! It seemed to come from so far away—a long, long way behind him. After the first salutation, it said, “Who is this little one?” When my sister had explained, the face smiled—(I was reassured by the smile, and the face looked less terrible)—and he asked me where I went to school, and which of my books I liked best. Alas! I could not then remember that I liked any, but my ever good angel-sister said she knew I was fond of poetry, for I had just won a prize for recitation. Upon this the face looked still more kindly at me, and we all moved together to a seat under the

trees. Then the far-away hollow voice—but it was not harsh—spoke again, as he put his hand in mine, and bade me tell him whether I liked my school-walks better than the walks at Richmond. This was too much, and it broke the ice of my silence. No, indeed! Greenwich Park was very pretty—so was Blackheath, with its donkeys, which we were, on occasions much too rare, allowed to ride. But Richmond! Nothing could be so beautiful! I was asked to name my favourite spots, and whether I had ever been in a punt—which I had,—and caught fish—which I had not. My tongue, once untied, ran on and on, and had after a time to be stopped, for my sister and the old lady-aunt thought I should fatigue the invalid. But he would not part just yet. He asked my name, and when it was told, exclaimed, “Oh, the old ballad!—do you know it?—which begins,—

‘Oh, my Helen,
There is no tellin’
Why love I fell in;
The grave, my dwellin’,
Would I were well in!’

I know now why with ‘my Helen, love I fell in’; it is because she loves poetry, and she loves Richmond. Will my Helen come and repeat her poetry to me some day?” This alarming suggestion at once silenced my prattle, and my sister had to express for me the pleasure and honour I was supposed to feel.

Here the interview ended. The kind hand was withdrawn which had lain in mine so heavily, and yet looked so thin and small. I did not then know how great is the weight of weakness. It was put upon my head, and I was bid God-speed! I was to be sent for some day soon. But the day never came; the school-days were at hand; those wondrous eyes I never saw, and that distant voice I never heard again.

How vividly some things remain with us! I can shut my eyes and recall the whole scene,—see and hear all that passed, and thrill again with my old fright and pleasure! The actual words I have mentioned, and many more that passed, doubtless would not have remained with me, if I had not heard them repeated often and often by my sister. She was as proud of

this little episode in my young life as if a king had noticed me ; and she spoke of her great hero's kind words to me so constantly, —telling them to all our friends,—that they became riveted in my memory. A day or two afterwards my sister met Miss Tidswell, who told her that Mr Kean had not suffered from his walk, and had often spoken of the little sweet-voiced maiden, who could be dumb, and yet full of talk when the right chord was struck. He was very fond, she said, of children, and would like the little sister to pay him an early visit. But this was not to be. He must have recovered from the illness which prevented him from sending for me, for I heard of his acting in London afterwards, and felt all a child's pride in having once attracted the attention of a distinguished man. And who so distinguished, so invested with charm for a girl's imagination, as the tragic hero of the day?

I cannot remember if the house into which I saw him go was the small house attached to the Richmond theatre, which I have heard belonged to him at the time of his death, and in which he died. With that little house are linked remembrances of mine very deep and lasting. In the parlour I dressed, not many years afterwards, for the part of Juliet, to make my first appearance on the stage. How this came about was somewhat singular. We were, as usual, in our summer quarters at Richmond. At this time a Mr Willis Jones was the lessee of the little theatre : he was, it was said, a gentleman of independent fortune, who had a great desire to be something more than an amateur actor. The performances took place about twice or thrice a-week. The stage-door of the theatre was always open, and on the off-days of performance we sometimes stole in and stood upon the, to me, weirdly mysterious place, the stage, looking into the gloom of the vacant pit and boxes. How full of mystery it all seemed ! so dim, so impenetrable ! One hot afternoon my sister and myself, finding it yet too sunny to walk down to the river—we had to pass the theatre on the way—took refuge in the dark cool place to rest awhile. On the stage was a flight of steps, and a balcony, left standing no doubt after rehearsal, or prepared for that of the next day. After sitting on the steps for a while, my sister exclaimed, “ Why, this might do for Romeo and Juliet's

balcony! Go up, birdie, and I will be your Romeo." Upon which, amid much laughter, and with no little stumbling over the words, we went through the balcony scene, I being prompter; for in the lonely days by the sea-shore, of which I have spoken, with only the great dog of the house as my companion, I had, almost unconsciously, learned by heart all the scenes in which my favourite heroines figured.

I may say that, in those days, Juliet, like the other heroines of my fancy, was attractive to me principally through what she had to suffer, in which the horror of her tomb, "the being *stified* in the vault," always my first terror, played a prominent part. Our school-walks from Greenwich took us at times to Lee churchyard, where there was a vault that to my imagination was altogether terrible. A flight of green, slimy-looking steps led down to a massive door with open iron-work at the upper part, and we girls used to snatch a fearful pleasure by peering through it into the gloom within. My favourite school-friend was a German girl, with a very pretty face, but in figure so ungainly that she was the despair of our dancing-master. She shared my dread of the terrible, and also the attraction I felt towards it. Over this vault we often talked, and we both agreed that in just such a tomb must Juliet have been placed. We had seen the toads and frogs hopping about in and out of it, and devoutly did we hope that Juliet's face was covered. For, oh the horror for her to have a cold flabby toad upon it! And then, had we not read of "worms that were her chamber-maids"?—an awful suggestion to the literal minds of young girls. How we rejoiced that, when she really awoke, she saw by her side the "comfortable friar"! To most young minds, I suppose, the terrible and the tragic are always the most alluring. Certainly at that time the fourth and fifth acts of *Romeo and Juliet* weighed heavier in the balance with me than the earlier and happy ones. Of the passion of love I had then naturally no knowledge. It did not interest me. But Juliet's devotion to Romeo, and her resolve to die rather than prove untrue, this I could understand, because all the heroes and heroines worthy of the name of whom I had read were always true and loyal.

But I have wandered far from this, to me, memorable afternoon at Richmond. My sister and I went away to the river, leaving the shadowy gloom of the stage empty as we had found it. To our surprise and consternation we learned, some little time after, that there had been a listener. When our friends arrived some days later, the lessee told them that, having occasion to go from the dwelling-house to his private box, he had heard voices, listened, and remained during the time of our merry rehearsal. He spoke in such warm terms of the Juliet's voice, its adaptability to the character, her figure,—I was tall for my age,—and so forth, that in the end he prevailed upon my friends to let me make a trial on his stage. To this, at my then very tender age, they were loath to consent. But I was to be announced simply as a young lady,—her first appearance. At the worst, a failure would not matter; and, at any rate, the experiment would show whether I had gifts or not in that direction. Thus did a little frolic prove to be the turning-point of my life. As I recall those days, and the interval that followed before my *début* on the London stage, where also I was announced to make my first appearance as Juliet, all my young life seemed wrapped up in her. You can see, therefore, how difficult it must be to divest myself of the emotions inseparable from her name sufficiently to write of her with critical calmness.

Before I attempt to do so, let me complete my gossiping account of my first appearance at Richmond. It was a summer evening, and the room was given me to dress in, which, I was told, had been Mr Kean's parlour and dressing-room. There was a glass case there in which were preserved as relics several articles of his toilet, brushes and things of that kind. How these brought to my mind that interview—the frail figure which seemed buried in furs, the large eyes so intense in their lustre, the dark hair straggling over the forehead, the voice coming from so far away, and the kind, quaint manner! I could now see how he had humoured the shy child by pretending ignorance, in order to draw forth her opinions and explanations. It was very sweet to look back upon, and I could almost believe that his spirit was there in sympathy with mine; had not his

parting words to me been—a God-speed? Very wisely, no one had ever mentioned in my hearing the word “stage fright.” I had thought of the performance only as another rehearsal, with the difference that it was at night and not by day, and with the great additional pleasure of wearing a new dress of white satin, which was so soft and exquisite to the touch, and—oh the dignity of this!—with a small train to it. It had no ornament, not even a flower; for when I heard that I must not wear real flowers, for fear of their dropping on the stage and some one slipping upon them, I would not have any others. As the time for the play to begin approached, and I heard the instruments tuning, and a voice cry out that “the overture was on,” I felt a most unaccountable sensation stealing over me. This feeling grew and grew until it nearly overcame me. I saw my mother looking very anxiously at me, and I could not hide from myself that I felt good for nothing. I begged her to leave me to myself for a few minutes. At first she did not gather what was in my mind, and tried to rally my courage: but again I begged to be left, for I knew well that when alone I could more freely seek the help which all so suddenly I seemed to need more than I ever could have guessed. My wish was granted. They did not return to me until I was wanted for the stage. I remember being asked if I had left anything behind, when I turned to give a last look at the relics in the glass case. It was a sort of farewell—a feeling as if life were ending.

My sister, to give me comfort, was to be the Lady Capulet. Poor darling! she was so agitated that they could hardly persuade her to appear on the scene; and when the nurse had called out for the “lamb,” the “ladybird” (your “ladybird,” you know, ever after), the Juliet rushed straight into her mother’s arms, never to be lured from them again during the scene by all the cajolings of the nurse. How the lights perplexed me! All seemed so different! I could see faces so close to me. It was well I could see *one* whose agitation was apparent to me on the instant. I felt I must try to please him, this dear friend of all my young life, my constant helper and instructor, who, though he was no blood relative, always called

me "his child." He it was who taught me very much of what I learned, after my delicate health took me from school, and sent me to the sea-shore, and to him and him only could I confide, with the assurance of perfect sympathy, all my devotion for the heroines of Shakespeare. He taught me the value of the different metres in blank verse and in rhyme, as I recited to him many of Milton's poems, the "Lycidas," large portions of "Paradise Lost," and Byron's "Darkness," which I knew by heart. He made me understand the value of words, nay, of every *letter* of every word, for the purposes of declamation. Nothing was to be slighted. This true friend—a man of varied and large acquirements, a humourist, too, and a wit—never refused, although most delicate in health, to give me largely of his time. How grateful I was, and am to him ! His death, which happened far too soon for my advantage—though not for his, it released him from a life of constant pain—robbed me of my first and truest guide and friend. It was *his* face I saw. Should his "child," his darling, give him pain—disappointment? No ! Gradually he and Juliet filled my mind, and I went on swimmingly, until the fourth act.

Here, with all the ardour and all the ignorance of a novice, I took no heed that the phial for the sleeping potion, which Friar Laurence had given me, was of glass, but kept it tightly in my hand, as though it were a real deliverance from a dreaded fate which it was to effect for me, through the long impassioned scene that follows. When the time came to drink the potion, there was none ; for the phial had been crushed in my hand, the fragments of glass were eating their way into the tender palm, and the blood was trickling down in a little stream over my much-admired dress. This had been for some time apparent to the audience, but the Juliet knew nothing of it, and felt nothing, until the red stream arrested her attention. Excited as I already was, this was too much for me ; and having always had a sickening horror of the bare sight or even talk of blood, poor Juliet grew faint, and went staggering towards the bed, on which she really fainted. I remember nothing of the end of the play, beyond seeing many kind people in my dressing-room, and wondering what this meant. Our good family doctor from London was among the audience, and bound up the wounded hand. This never

occurred again, because they ever afterwards gave me a wooden phial. But oh, my dress!—my first waking thought. I was inconsolable, until told that the injured part could be renewed.

So much for my first Juliet! I repeated the character several times in the same little theatre—each time trying to make it more like what I thought would satisfy my dear master. I sought no other praise.

On the last occasion he was there. When I saw him at the end of the play I was sure something was wrong. He was very silent, and when I begged to have his opinion, whatever it might be, he told me I had not improved,—that I had disappointed him. I was not *in* the character throughout, and he feared I had not the true artistic power to lose myself in the being of another. Oh the pain this caused me! The wound is even now only scarred over. I would not let him see my grief, but I knew no sleep that night for weeping. My generous sweet sister thought I had been cruelly treated, and tried to comfort me and heal my wounds, but they were far too deep for that.

Next day my dear friend was deeply pained to see that I had taken his censure so sorely to heart, and had forgotten how, here and there, it had been tempered with approbation. After some talk with my mother, it was decided that Juliet and all other heroines were for me to pass once more into “the sphere of dream.” I was quietly to forget them and return to my studies. My friend confessed that he had expected too much from my tender years—that an English girl of the age which Shakespeare assigns to Juliet was in every respect a different creature. Development must come later; I certainly was never a precocious child. So until I appeared about three years later on the London stage, my life was very studious and very quiet.

How good and tender and helpful that dear friend was to me ever after, and how repentant for having caused me that bitter night of sorrow, taking all the blame upon himself, and declaring that he had no right to look for what he did in one so young! Doubtless he was wrong in expecting too much; but the lesson I then learned was never forgotten. He saw and helped me in every other character I acted until his too

early death, which was the first great sorrow of my life. Generous heart, I hope your own could tell you how loving and how grateful mine was!

The last night he saw me act was at Drury Lane, and he had almost to be carried to his private box. He died about ten days after. Never can I forget how good and thoughtful for me Mr Macready proved himself at this time. I had something very important and difficult to study at a short notice—I forget what. It was drawing towards the end of a season in which my work had been most exhausting. I was very ill and tired, so that my memory, usually quick enough, seemed to fail me. I grew nervous, and told Mr Macready that even by sitting up at night I feared I could not be ready at the time he wished. This engrossing study accounted for my not seeing my dear friend for some days together—only sending to his house daily to inquire after him. During one of those nights that I was spending in study—the night before its results were to be made public—he died. This was kept from me, but word of the sad event was sent in the morning to Mr Macready. As my acting that night was of the utmost importance, he sent me a kind note, asking me to go to him directly at the theatre, share his little dinner, and go quietly over with him the scenes which were making me nervous, telling me he was quite sure he could put me at my ease. I accepted his invitation, and his gentle kindness I shall ever remember with gratitude. As the afternoon wore on, he sent for my dresser, and told her to make me lie down for an hour or two before I thought of dressing for the stage. I had a lurking feeling through the day that something was happening, for all about me looked at me so earnestly and kindly, but what trouble was hanging over me I could not even guess, because the last news given to me of my dear friend before I left home had been reassuring.

When the performance was over, Mr Macready met me as I was leaving my room, and put a letter into my hand, giving me the impression that it was upon business,—I was tired, he said, and the morning would be the best time to read it. Its object really was to tell me of his sympathy, and to offer what comfort he could, for he knew well how dear was the friend whom I had

lost. However, as my great struggle of the night was over, I insisted, in spite of all the remonstrances of my maid, on calling at my friend's house, which we had to pass on the way home, and I got out of the carriage to make my own inquiries. The surprised and frightened look of the servant who opened the door told me everything, and I saw at once why all had combined to keep me in ignorance throughout the day. Then I understood how thoughtful Mr Macready had been. His letter was most kind. He gave me some days' rest to face my trouble, although, as the close of the season was near, he must have been put to extreme inconvenience by my absence.

Oh the sharpness of that grief! The prelude, too, of another trial; for suddenly Mr Macready gave up the management of Drury Lane and went to America. Another friend lost! He had been four years at the head of a theatre—two at Covent Garden and two at Drury Lane—doing his very best to raise the tone of the stage to a level worthy of its great poet; while those whom he had gathered round him gladly seconded his efforts, and followed his guidance.¹

To me the breaking up of this establishment was a heavy blow indeed. Severe as my labours had been, the delight in them far more than outweighed the fatigue. Drury Lane Theatre, so conducted, was an arena in which every gift I had found scope for exercise. My studies were all of an elevating character: my thoughts were given to the great types of womanhood, drawn by Shakespeare's master-hand, or by the hands of modern poets—Browning, Marston, Troughton, Bulwer Lytton, and others— anxious to maintain the reputation of the national drama. My audiences, kind to me from the first, grew ever more and more kind, and I felt among them as among friends. Now an end to all this had come—"the world seemed shattered at my feet." Engagements were offered to me in many theatres; in one case I

¹ I have often seen it stated that Mr Macready abandoned the management of Drury Lane Theatre because he lost money by it. This was not so. The theatre had so prospered under his management, that the proprietors, selfishly desiring to profit by a prosperity not of their own creating, demanded an increased rent. This so angered Mr Macready that he declined to renew his lease, and went away to America.

was even asked to assume the office of directress. But I shrank from the responsibilities of such a position, and felt that, for my own interests as an artist, it was not well to allow myself to be hampered by them.

Ill and sad at heart, it was then that the kindness of you, my dear friend, and others like you, cheered my drooping spirits, and encouraged me to believe that I could walk alone—nay, that a chance which seemed then a calamity might ultimately prove an advantage in my art, by leaving me to develop what was in me, relieved from the overmastering influence of Mr Macready's style. Young in my art as I was—although the whole weight of every leading female character had, since my *début*, rested on my shoulders—all my friends agreed that engagements for a week or two at a time in the leading provincial theatres would be the best practice for me. I could thus, too, take rest in the intervals between my various engagements,—rest so necessary for me, overtaxed as my strength had continually been since the beginning of my professional career. Both then and afterwards, I could never have been equal to the strain upon heart and brain and body, but for the summer months, in which I always took holiday, passing them quietly among my friends.

It was with a sad heart enough that I started on my first engagement out of London,—for Mr Macready had always told me that it was in London I must make my home, as no provincial audience would care for or understand my style. I took Edinburgh first, and had a sufficiently cold reception from a house far from full. I had gone, as I afterwards always made it my rule to go, wherever I went, without any heralds in advance to proclaim my coming or to sound my praises. However, the lessee and manager, Mr Murray—a man of great dramatic ability and many accomplishments, who acted Colonel Damas to my Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons*, this first night of my experience there—told me not to be disheartened. He felt sure, he said, I had taken hold of my audience, and that this was the only indifferent house before which I should ever have to act there. The event proved that he knew his public; his prophecy, indeed, was more than realised, for neither there nor elsewhere did I ever again play to an indifferently filled

house. Of want of enthusiasm or of constancy in my provincial audiences no one could have had less reason to complain, nor had I ever occasion from that hour to be reminded of what Mr Macready had predicted. Had the state of the theatres in London been such as to admit of my joining them, I would willingly have done so. I longed for my London audiences, who had been so kind, so true, so sympathetic in my earliest efforts. And although for some little time I only came before them at intervals and for short engagements, yet they always made me feel that I was not forgotten, and that they were as quick as ever to go along with me in my efforts to interpret the heart and nature of woman, as drawn by our master-poets.

But let me go back to my earliest days. Nearly three years, as I have said, elapsed, after my first girlish experiments, before I again trod the stage,—not this time the tiny stage of Richmond, but the vast stage of Covent Garden, and before an audience that filled the theatre from floor to ceiling. The interval, spent in quiet study, had widened my views about many things, Juliet included. Still I remained true to my first love; and when it was decided that I should submit myself to the dread ordeal of a London audience, to ascertain whether I possessed the qualities to justify my friends in allowing me to adopt the stage as a profession, I selected Juliet for my first appearance. I rehearsed the part several times, and was announced to appear in it. During the rehearsals, Mr Charles Kemble, who was then taking his leave of the stage, was always present, seated in the front of the dark theatre. On his judgment and that of one or two others, I believe the manager was to decide whether, having no experience or practice in the actor's art, being indeed a mere novice, I was fit to make an appearance before a London audience. I was not told at the time through what an ordeal I was passing. Mr Kemble gave judgment in my favour, and was to have taken the part of Mercutio. How sympathetic, and courteous, and encouraging he was! He, to use his own words to me, was making his final bow to his art, as I my first curtsey.

Unhappily for me, the rehearsals showed that the Romeo of the theatre—the only one available at the time—was of too mature an age to act with so young a Juliet when she came

before an audience on her *début*. A month or two later I did act the character with him. He was an excellent actor in his way, but very vehement,—so much so that, when he played Romeo, my sister would never trust me in the tomb alone. He shook it so violently with the crowbar, that she used to declare, if she had not been there to play the part of a caryatid, and help to hold it up, the frail fabric would have dropped to pieces on my head. Oh ! if I had not had a very different Romeo in my imagination, it would have been hard indeed to make one out of such an unromantic spluttering lover ! When Mr Macready undertook the management very soon after, Mr James Anderson joined the company, and I had in him a very gallant Romeo. Discretion tempered his fire.

Judge of my dismay when, a short time before my *début*, I was told that I must forego Juliet, and appear as Julia in *The Hunchback*. I was almost heart-broken. But it was too late to recede ; and as Julia I had to appear. How much this added to the terrible tension of feeling with which I approached the trial, none but myself can ever know. You, my dear friend, were there, as you have told me, and you know, as a spectator, what a fearful ordeal I had to pass through. On this occasion I had no loving sister's arms to rush into ; but I remember gratefully how kind Miss Taylor was to me ; she was the Helen of that evening, as she had been the original Helen of the play. At the rehearsals she had given me valuable advice as to the stage directions, &c., and during the actual performance she comforted and supported me with all her might, and with all the fine tact of a sympathetic heart.

How well I remember that awful moment when called to the side-scene to be ready for my entrance with Helen ! Seeing my agitation, Miss Taylor set herself to divert my attention by admiring my dress. She liked, she said, the yellowish whiteness of it ; she could not endure a harsh dead white. Where had mamma, who was standing beside us, got me such dainty mittens ? Then she showed me her own—said how fortunate I was to have such long wavy hair that curled of its own accord, and did not need dressing,—wished hers was the same, and how she had to curl and pinch and torture it and herself, in order to get the same

effect,—anything to take off my attention. But as the dreadful moment drew nearer, this talk, all on one side, would no longer help. With sympathetic tears in her own eyes, she begged me not to let those big tears fall so continuously and spoil my pretty cheeks; and when the terrible moment came for our entrance, she put her arm round my waist, and propelled me forward, whispering to me to “curtsey to the applause—again!—again!”—when, but for her help, I could hardly stand.

It must have been plain to the audience how good she was to me; and they, no doubt, favourite as she was, liked her all the better for it. I cannot but think what a different play *The Hunchback* was then, when Helen was interpreted by this lady. Her refinement of manner took away nothing from the archness and piquancy of her scenes with Modus, but rather added to them. He, too, appeared as a real student, not unmannerly and dull from want of breeding and sense, but only awkward from abstraction and absorption in his book-lore. It was sheer *ennui*, and not forwardness, that made Helen in the dull country-house amuse herself with him. I shudder to think to what I have seen these scenes reduced. Latterly, indeed, I declined to act in this play, because I did not like to be mixed up, even indirectly, with such misinterpretations.¹ It is woful that an author's words and meaning should be degraded by such tones and looks and manner, and that audiences should be found ready to bear with, if not indeed to enjoy, these perversions of his purpose.

At the end of the first act some of the kind actors came about

¹ In truth, I was not very sorry to have an excuse for giving up the performance of a play which I never cordially liked. Julia's character was one that really took no hold of my heart, therefore I always went to the impersonation of it as a piece of taskwork. Some of the situations are unquestionably powerful. They are, however, of a kind in which success will always be due as much to the individual power of the actress as to the author. By what she herself infuses into the character she must veil its inconsistencies, and so animate it with feeling and passion as to make the audience forget the improbabilities of the plot on which it turns, and the somewhat unlovable qualities of the heroine. If the warm sympathy and applause of audiences could have made me like the part of Julia, I ought to have been fond of it; but they were dearly bought at the cost of the severe strain upon my imagination and my emotions, as well as the great physical fatigue which went to gain them.

me, saying that it was "all right." I had only to take courage and speak louder. But, alas! I felt it was "all wrong." I could not control my fears and agitation. They gave me *sal volatile* in my dressing-room, which I gave mostly to my dress. My mother looked sad and disappointed; the dear old dresser very pitiful.¹ My sister, alas! was not then with me. I thought all was over, and did not see my way at all to getting through the play. Then came a knock at my dressing-room door, which my mother answered, and I heard the dear accustomed voice of my friend and master say, "Have you given the poor child anything?" I cried out for him to come to me, but the voice answered, "Not now, my child; take all the rest you can." There was, I fancied, such a trouble in the tone, that it added to my own. It was evident he could not trust himself near me. He had been among the audience, but in that enormous theatre only a sea of heads was seen. No one could be distinguished; so this time he had not helped me. I felt despairing. Never can I forget that half-hour. While I write, it comes back upon me with all its hopeless anguish.

When we met at the side-scene for the second act, kind Miss

¹ This excellent woman, who was attached to my dressing-room on this my first night as my attendant, never left me afterwards while I was permanently in London. We were attached to each other from that time. She never left my side except when I was on the stage, but attended with a shawl or cloak all my exits or entrances. She used to be called my "duenna," for she hurried me away from those who might wish to speak or detain me, with, "I beg your pardon, my young lady has already only too little time to change her dress, or to rest in," as it might be. My mother had full confidence in this good woman's care of me, and with good cause. She had known her before she became, as she was now, a widow. The nursing of her husband in a long decline had exhausted her means, and caused her to seek the occupation in which I first knew her. The sweet, refined, unselfish, pure-minded woman was a great assistance and comfort to me. Silence was the order my mother had given as the rule for my dressing-room,—no talk to take my thoughts from the work I had in hand. I never knew the dear creature break it, except after the scenes where the nurse proves untrue to Juliet. Then her indignation knew no bounds;—such treachery, such desertion of her charge in the hour of her trouble—nothing could be so wicked in her eyes! Even the frequent repetition of the play hardly calmed her anger. This dear woman, whose rare qualities I have never seen excelled, even in stations far above her own, reached her rest in 1883, in her cottage at Old Windsor.

Taylor again went through the admirer's part; she liked my hat and feather, and my whole dress,—thought them very charming, very becoming, reminded me that now we were to change characters,—that I was to be the gay fine lady, and she only the listening astonished one. A very watery smile was, I am sure, all that answered her. When we entered upon the scene, and during the pause at the long kind reception which again awaited me, my eyes lighted on a familiar face raised above all the others, and close before me in the orchestra. Long white hair fell on each side of it, and I saw the handkerchief wiping tears from the eyes. Again a face saved me! I knew it was that of my dear grandfather, who, because of his deafness, was, during the play, allowed to occupy the leader's seat. In an instant the thought flashed into my mind of the sad disappointment that was in store for these dear grand-parents, who had been real parents to me in all my earliest years,—the one present, and the other, the beloved Quaker grandmother, who had never in her life been inside a theatre. She was waiting in an agony of suspense, as I knew, at home, and her blessing had been the last thing on my heart as I left it. Oh, I could not endure to pain *them*! The help I sorely needed, which I knew was even then being invoked for me, came. In a moment, as it seemed, my agitation calmed. My voice gained tone, and when the point arrived where I had to say "I'll shine, be sure I will," the kind audience interrupted me with a shout of applause. From this time I never faltered, always keeping the dear and now smiling face before me.

At the end of the third act I was told the manager (not Mr Macready; he took the management a little later) had requested to see my friends to consult them about a three years' engagement, which, as I was much under age, was signed by them for me the next morning, and attached me for that period to the theatre, as the leading actress. Thus was I bound to the art which has been the delight of my after-life, and the way opened for me to clothe—oh happy privilege!—with form and motion the great creations of poetical genius over which my girlish imagination had long brooded.

Of Mr Charles Kemble's good opinion of me I have already

spoken. When it was decided that the play should be changed to *The Hunchback*, he offered to resume his original part of Sir Thomas Clifford to support me. Never can I forget his rendering of it. What a high and noble bearing! What tender respect in his approaches as a lover! What dignified forbearance and self-respect in his reproof afterwards, and in his deportment as the Secretary! All this made the heroine's part more difficult to act; for what girl, even the most frivolous, could for a moment have thought of the title or the fortune of such a man in comparison with himself?

In connection with that first night in Covent Garden, I must tell you a little anecdote of my German schoolfellow. On that night a young girl was sitting near some of our friends. Throughout the performance she made herself very conspicuous by clapping her hands and breaking out into admiring but very disturbing exclamations. At last some one near ventured on a gentle remonstrance, and a remark that she could not be aware of the noise she was making. In reply she said, "Oh, please, do not mind,—really I cannot help it. She is my schoolfellow, and I am so happy!" It was explained to her between the acts that she was speaking to friends who knew me. Upon this she became very confidential, told them many incidents of our school-days, and sent me more loves and messages than could be carried. But the ever-recurring refrain was, "Why had I been unfaithful to our school-love, Juliet, whose tomb in Lee churchyard we had so often dressed up with horrors, and in which character she had heard of my appearing at Richmond?" It was very hard to make her understand that there was no Romeo to be had youthful enough for her old play-mate's Juliet.

Something of this was told me at the end of the second act of the play by my dear friend and master, who came to my room (this time) joyously, and being now assured that all was well, did his best to animate my courage. He made me laugh by his description of the vehemence of my young school-friend, and he was made the bearer of a message from me to her. She was to go the next day and tell our dear governess and her sister, near whom she lived, all about the night. This was

such a lucky incident: it made me forget in part the dreaded audience, and filled my mind with fresh incentives to succeed, in order to give pleasure to all the dear friends whose thoughts I knew were with me.

I said, in the beginning of this letter, that Juliet was inwoven with my life. Some of the reasons I have mentioned; but there are others that touch me very deeply, which are inseparably linked with the character.

My beloved only sister was with me in my dressing-room while I was acting Juliet during the last hours we were together in life. During that sad evening we talked of the sportive afternoon rehearsal at Richmond in which she was my Romeo, and all that had come out of it. We parted the next morning; and oh, what a parting!—she to start that day with her husband for America, where in Boston, eighteen months afterwards, alas! she died. By a strange coincidence, the first time I appeared after the fatal news reached me, I acted a portion of Juliet. The occasion was one of those unsatisfactory monster performances which had been arranged many weeks before, in order to make up the sum required for the statue of Mrs Siddons, now placed in Westminster Abbey. Mr Macready was requested to act in some scenes from *Henry the Fourth*, and I to give the fourth act in *Romeo and Juliet*. What the other performances were, I do not remember. The blow had fallen upon me only some ten days before, and it made me entirely unfit for exertion of any kind. But the committee wrote so pressingly to me, urging that to take my name from the programme would seriously affect the receipts, that at last I consented to make the effort, not caring much what became of me. How the whole misery of that time comes before me now! Mr Macready, who knew my sister, and therefore knew how grievous her loss was to me, sent, and came to my dressing-room door, several times during the evening, asking after, and pressing to see, and say a few words to me. We had not met for some time. He was fulfilling his farewell engagements in the provinces, and our paths were different. I felt that I could not bear his look of sympathy or words of kindness, and had to deny myself to him. Even the very sound of his voice heard at the door was all but

too much for me. I had a duty before me, and I dared not break in upon the calm which I had forced upon myself. Over my Juliet's dress I threw a large flowing black veil, which I hugged to my heart as an outward proof of the mourning within it, and which, in some measure, comforted me. Besides, it also hid from me the kind faces which, I felt sure, would meet mine at the side-scenes.

The greetings of the audience did not move me. They did not know my grief, so I could bear them. I got on very well in the scene with the Friar. There was despair in it, but nothing that in any way touched upon my own trial. My great struggle was in Juliet's chamber when left alone. Then her desolation, her loneliness, became mine, and the rushing tears would have way. Happily the fearful images presented to Juliet's mind of what is before her in the tomb soon sent softer feelings away; but how glad I was when the fancied sight of Tybalt's ghost allowed the grief that was in my heart to find vent in a wild cry of anguish as well as horror!

From Juliet's bed I was taken to my own, which kept me for many a long day. That is a night which I hardly dare to look back upon. Months and months followed, when the cry was ever in my heart for my loved one, whose loss was to me that of half my life. Can you wonder, then, what thoughts and memories Juliet stirs within me?

It shocks me to think how egotistical I must appear in recounting to you all these personal details. But in writing of these things, I look back upon myself as upon some other person. And then you, dear friend, and many other friends, have so strongly urged me to tell you of my past in relation to the work I did, that you must share the blame with me.

What I have to say of Shakespeare's Juliet must be reserved for another letter.—Ever your loving and grateful "ladybird,"

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

To Mrs S. C. HALL.

V.

J U L I E T

(CONCLUDED)

[REDACTED]

[illegible]

V.

JULIET

(CONCLUDED).

ONslow SQUARE, 1881.

“Trust me, gentleman, I’ll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.”

LET me try now, my dear friend, to speak to you of the real Juliet as she filled my imagination when the time came for me to venture on impersonating her in London. In my first trials at Richmond I had ardour and self-forgetfulness enough ; but I was too young, too near the age of Shakespeare’s Juliet, considering the tardier development of an English girl, to understand so strong and deep a nature ; neither had my imagination the power to grasp the whole scope and purpose of the play ; and without this power no one can ever be qualified to embody one of Shakespeare’s heroines. Hitherto I had only known the outward form of the poet’s exquisite creation, and could not reach the deeper meaning that lies beneath it ; indeed I never should have reached it, had I not subsequently been allowed to see the real Shakespeare instead of the imperfect copy, adapted and condensed for the stage, in which I originally knew the play. Now a new light broke in upon me. It was no longer only a love-story, the most beautiful of all I had ever read, but a tale where, as in the Greek dramas of which I had

seen some glimpses, the young and innocent were doomed to punishment in retribution for the guilt of kindred whose "bloody feuds" were to be expiated and ended by the death of their posterity.

But even then how little could I know! Although the torch had been put into my hand, I could only see what my small experience showed me. The wonderful proportion, the harmony, the loveliness and pathos, grew upon me only with my mental growth, and could not be grasped in unripe years. Besides, I needed above all things the practice in my art, which to the artist is the greatest help towards developing the poet's meaning, and which throws lights upon it that no study, however close, can give. In certain moods of mind the poet's intention may be read in this way as plainly as in an open book. The inspiration of the scene makes clear what before had not been even dreamed of, but which, once shown, is never to be forgotten or neglected. I always tried to keep my mind open to such revealings,—tried not to repeat mechanically any part of any character, but always to go to it as though I had never acted it before. This was easy enough in Shakespeare's plays, but very difficult in those of some other dramatists.

With the complete play in my hands, I could not fail to see that the key-note was struck in the Prologue, where the whole purpose of the poet is told within the compass of a sonnet. It speaks of the bitter feuds of "two households" for whose rivalry lives were being sacrificed, and for whose "ancient grudge" the followers of both were continually breaking into "new mutiny." To teach a lesson to the reckless leaders of those brawls, "bred of an airy word," it was necessary that each should suffer in his tenderest point, each lose his dearest hope, his only child—

"Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Do, with their death, bury their parents' strife."

Nor was the lesson to be read to them alone, but to those "rebellious subjects" also, those "enemies of peace," who helped by their violent partisanship to disturb the quiet and security of Verona's streets.¹

¹ I considered this Prologue of so much importance for the audience, that

As if to emphasise the purpose shown in the Prologue, almost the last words in the play are those spoken by the Prince of Verona, whose kinsmen Mercutio and Paris had both fallen victims to a purely hereditary animosity!—

“Capulet! Montague!
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That Heaven finds means to kill your joys with love!
And I, for winking at your discords too,
Have lost a brace of kinsmen :—all are punished.”

With these passages before me, I started on my study of the play from a fresh point. Romeo and Juliet were no common lovers. In their persons they must be pure, beautiful, generous, devoted, and in every way meet, like the spotless Iphigenia, to be offered up a worthy sacrifice to the gods as an expiation for the past, a healing and propitiation for the future; and in such wise that the remembrance of their death should make impossible any after-enmity—each party alike sharing in the woful penalty.

“*Capulet.* O brother Montague, give me thy hand :
This is my daughter’s jointure, for no more
Can I demand.

“*Montague.* But I can give thee more :
For I will raise her statue in pure gold ;
That, while Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure at such rate be set,
As that of true and faithful Juliet.

“*Cap.* As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie ;
Poor sacrifices of our enmity !”

Very terrible has been the awakening of these two passionate old men to the miserable folly of their feud! At our first sight of them, they rush angrily into the *mêlée* of their retainers which opens the play,—no reason asked how it has arisen—Capulet shouting, “Give me my long sword, ho!” and Montague, held back by his wife, hurling defiance in the words, “Thou villain Capulet!” At our last sight of them, we leave them standing

during my last engagement at Drury Lane, in 1869, I used to speak it, no one else being inclined to undertake the task, with a silk domino thrown over my dress, and in front of a fine scene—painted many years before by Mr David Roberts—representing the Tomb of the Scaligers in Verona.

remorsefully hand in hand by the dead bodies of their only children, each reading in the other's face the rueful lineaments of his own cureless grief.

It is only when the din of the street brawl has died down under the stern rebuke and threats of the Prince of Verona that we hear of Romeo. "Right glad I am," says Lady Montague, "he was not at this fray." Then, in answer to her inquiry as to where he is, she is told by his friend and cousin, Benvolio, that he was seen an hour before dawn walking in one of his favourite haunts "underneath the grove of sycamore." This intelligence draws from his father the remark, that

"Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew."

Shakespeare, we see, has taken the greatest pains to show the kind of love-sickness into which Romeo has been thrown by the charms of the fair but icy Rosaline, who chose to be "forsworn to love"—that vague yearning of the fancy, that idle listlessness which finds vent in "sighing like furnace," and writing sonnets to his "mistress' eyebrow," and is as unlike the love which is soon to absorb his whole soul "as moonlight is to sunlight, or as water is to wine." Much of it is but "according to the fashion of the time." Not only Romeo's habits, his very language undergoes a change from the moment he sees Juliet. It is no longer the fancy but the heart that speaks.

Shakespeare prepares us early for the coming tragedy in the foreboding reluctance with which Romeo allows himself to be persuaded by his friends to go to the "old accustomed feast" that night at Capulet's house. Destiny has begun her work. Some power constrains him against his will. He has no thought of enjoyment before him, for he says—

"Give me a torch : I am not for this ambling ;
Being but heavy, I will bear the light.

Mercutio. Nay, gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.

Romeo. Not I, believe me : you have dancing shoes
With nimble soles ; I have a sole of lead,
So stakes me to the ground, I cannot move.

.
I'll be a candle-holder, and look on."

Even although he has heard that the fair Rosaline is to be among the guests, he is unable to throw off a heavy misgiving of calamity "hanging in the stars," which is to date from "this night's revels," and to close in "some vile forfeit of untimely death." "But," he adds,

"He, that hath the steerage of my course,
Direct my sail!"

—words which always remind me of those to the same effect spoken by the Lady in *Comus*, when forebodings and anxieties perplex her—

"Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial
To my proportioned strength!"

In every way happier than Juliet, Romeo is fortunate in his parents. They are from the first loving, considerate, and sympathetic; and, had they known his wishes, they would have spared no pains to gratify them. Not so with Juliet. Although an only child, there has been obviously not much tenderness lavished on her. "Earth," says Lord Capulet,

"hath swallow'd all my hopes but she;
She is the hopeful lady of my earth."

This would lead one to believe that she was the cherished joy of his life. And when Paris presses his suit, he says—

"Get her heart,
My will to her consent is but a part."

Yet this profession does not stand the proof; for when, later, his child entreats with all the earnestness of despair but to be heard, he is deaf as an adder to her appeal, his own will admitting of no question. Apart from this unreasonable despotism in his family, old Capulet is in every sense a gentleman. Observe, for instance, the manner in which he reprimands Tybalt when he would insult Romeo at the ball—

"Young Romeo is't? Verona brags of him,
To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth;
I would not for the wealth of all this town
Here in my house do him disparagement:
Therefore be patient, take no note of him:
It is my will. . . ."

Tybalt. I'll not endure him.

Cap.

He shall be endured.

What, goodman boy !—I say, he shall ;—Go to ;—

You'll not endure him ! . . .

You'll make a mutiny among my guests !”

Choleric and unreasonable as he is, yet I like him better than his wife, who appears to me to be a piece of cold, formal propriety ; of the type that would “with a hoard of shallow maxims preach down a daughter's heart.” One can see that there is no sympathy between Lady Capulet and her daughter, although Juliet, her “loving child,” as she calls her when she has lost her, would not question that she owed her mother all obedience, and would, when she first comes before us, never hesitate in showing it. With what bluntness this hard mother brings the sacred subject of marriage before the mind of her undeveloped, yet, as she ought to know, imaginative daughter !—

“Tell me, daughter Juliet,

How stands your disposition to be married ?”

Juliet's simple quiet reply should have taught her how far from her thoughts was such a subject—“It is an honour that I dream not of.”

She stands a silent, almost indifferent listener to all her mother has to say concerning the virtues, beauties, and accomplishments of Paris, her panegyric echoed in the garrulous piling up of admiring epithets by the Nurse—

“Why, he's a man of wax.

Nay, he's a flower ; in faith, a very flower.”

Impatient at getting no response from Juliet after this outburst, Lady Capulet says—

“Speak briefly, can you like of Paris' love ?”

Juliet, startled and unprepared, takes up the word given to her, and says—

“I'll look to like, if looking liking move :”

but adds in all ignorant obedience—

“But no more deep will I endart mine eye

Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.”

Poor Juliet! With a father who loves her in a wilful, passionate way, with the understanding that when he has set his mind upon a thing her will shall always bend to his; with a mother who, if she loves her daughter, entirely fails to understand her nature, or to feel for her in a matter where even hard mothers are tender; and having for her only other friend, her foster-mother,—a coarse-minded, weakly indulgent, silly woman,—over whom, since her infancy, she has ruled supreme, coaxing and tyrannising by turns,—not one of them having, as we are brought to see, an idea of marriage beyond the good worldly match thought necessary for the rich heiress of the Capulets! Amid such surroundings has bloomed into early girlhood this creature, with a rich imagination full of romance, and with a boundless capacity for self-devotion. Her dreams are of a future, with a love in store for her responsive to her own capacity of loving, and they are inspired by an ideal hero possessing the best attributes of manhood,—a love in which her whole being should be merged, and by which her every faculty and feeling should be quickened into noblest life.

These dreams were even now to be realised in the person of him who was unwillingly making his slow way among the maskers to her father's festival, carrying his "heavy burden" of love along with him. He has not found it the "tender thing" which Mercutio calls it. No—

"It is too rough,
Too rude, too boisterous; and it pricks like thorn."

Following his friends into the ball-room he looks carelessly around, and lo! what do his eyes light upon? A vision of a beauty never imagined before!

No haughty coldness here, no measured stately movement. He watches entranced this lovely vision swaying to the rhythmic movement of the music, with unstudied grace, so noble, yet so childlike; looking for nothing, unconscious of admiring eyes upon her, herself delighting only in the simple enjoyment of the dance, with a bright and happy smile of amused delight at the novelty of the scene beaming in her lovely and innocent face.

What is this creature, this "snowy dove trooping with crows"?

"What lady's that, which doth enrich the hand
Of yonder knight?"

he asks some strange servant; who replies—

"I know not, sir.

Rom. O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear:
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!

Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night."

All the wonder of this gracious creature's charm flashes swift as lightning upon him, and reveals to his awakened senses a something before which all former dreams and yearnings vanish, and become as though they had never been. He feels instinctively that there is within this peerless form a soul as peerless, towards which his own rushes as towards its other self. The languid fantastic youth of dreams and whims becomes at once the man of purpose. He puts on his armour and begins the battle of life. No hesitation now, such as we had seen in him before,—no more, "my mind misgives me!"

Meanwhile, we may be sure that "yonder knight," who is no other than the County Paris, has been doing his best during the dance to excite Juliet's admiration. She has come straight from the recapitulation of his perfections, and knows well from her mother's words that "like" him or not, this comely gentleman, "the valiant Paris," is destined by her parents to be her husband. She has therefore "looked to like," as she was told to do, but evidently with no success on her part, whatever increase of ardour the meeting may have brought to Paris. Her heart and fancy are alike untouched, when, at the close of the dance, a stranger, in the dress of a pilgrim, "with his cockle, hat, and staff," approaches to watch, as he says,

"her place of stand,
And, touching hers, make happy my rude hand."

During the dispute between Capulet and Tybalt, Romeo has made his way to Juliet. It is only the close of their conversation

that we hear, when he asks, as the pilgrim, that his "unworthy hand" may be permitted to touch "this holy shrine," earnestly pleading that he may be allowed to atone for the roughness of his touch by the softer pressure of his lips upon her flower-soft hand. The touch is gentle, the words are few; but that touch of "palm to palm," those few words, have an eloquence more persuasive than volumes of passionate phrases. The beseeching eyes, the tremulous voice full of adoration and humility—have these not spoken? The heart's deepest meanings rarely find utterance in words.

The "dear saint" replies to the holy pilgrim's devotion in a playful manner, telling him that his lips, as a pilgrim, he "must use in prayer." Far too soon breaks in the Nurse, who no doubt likes not this talk with a stranger, and tells Juliet that her mother craves a word with her. Romeo takes this opportunity to ask, "What is her mother?" Upon which the Nurse replies that she is the "lady of the house, and a good lady," and that she herself had nursed her daughter, whom he had "talk'd withal," adding, in the true gossiping manner of her class:—

"I tell you,—he, that can lay hold of her,
Shall have the chinks.

Rom.

Is she a Capulet?

O dear account! my life is my foe's debt."

Benvolio hurries his friend away before, as he thinks, the fact of their presence has been discovered—and also wisely, while yet "the sport is at the best." Lord Capulet most courteously urges them to remain to supper, although he has been told who they are; and finding they decline, he bids them good night, thanking them graciously for their company:—

"Why, then, I thank you all;
I thank you, honest gentlemen; good night."

Juliet naturally wishes to know Romeo's name, as he had desired to know hers. As the Montagues leave the room, each by turns saluting her, she asks and learns from the Nurse the names of Romeo's friends. He lingers last; and to her eager "What's he, that follows, there," she adds, to recall him more particularly to the Nurse's attention, what must have appeared very singular

wildly and entirely taken possession of her. The tumult of her feelings must find vent. What a new life has opened to her! The past seems swept away; her spirit has risen with a bound as at some undreamt-of call. It has not been left to her will to determine how "deep she will endart her eye." The invincible and unknown Erôs has come upon her unlooked for, unannounced, in all his terror and in all his beauty. But he to whom she is prepared to "give up all herself" is separated from her by a bitter and impassable family feud of which she has been hearing all her life. Her throbbing pulse, the flush of the heated ball-room, make the cool moonlight air most welcome. She could not breathe within. Here she is alone, safe even from the silly prattle of the Nurse, whom she has left dozing in her chair. She will tell her secret to the soft night breeze,—whisper to it over and over the name which is so dear and yet so fatal,—adjure young Montague in fancy to renounce it,

"And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself."

Oh, how sweeter far than sweetest note of any nightingale must have been that soft, tremulous, half-inarticulate voice as it floated in the still air towards Romeo's ear! What ecstasy to learn, and *thus* to learn, that she who "has wounded him so deeply, is by him wounded"! At first too amazed, too doubtful of his joy, he is fearful to interrupt her spoken reverie, but upon the offer of herself his self-restraint can hold out no longer, and he breaks in vehemently with—

"I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo."

Too terrified at first at finding she has had a listener, Juliet recognises neither voice nor words, and exclaims angrily—

"What man art thou, that, thus bescreen'd in night,
So stumblest on my counsel "

In his reply he shrinks from repeating the name which is hateful to himself, "because it is an enemy to thee." With a thrill of rapture Juliet whispers to herself—

"My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound."

Yet she must be assured from his own lips how he came hither and wherefore. Thus, when she tells him of the peril of the place,—no less than death, "if any of my kinsmen find thee here,"—he answers—

"Alack ! there lies more peril in thine eye,
Than twenty of their swords ; look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity."

Rapturously welcome to her heart as this rejoinder is, it cannot still her anxiety for his safety.

"I would not for the world they saw thee here.
Rom. And but thou love me, let them find me here :
My life were better ended by their hate,
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love."

Then she is full of amazement as to how he came there. Who could have guided him ?

"By whose direction found'st thou out this place ?
Rom. By love."

All—love. Love is on his lips as in his heart.

"I am no pilot ; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise."

Juliet, when partly pacified as to his safety—"I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight"—has time to think of how she has committed herself, in how unmaidenly a guise she must appear before him.

Women are deeply in debt to Shakespeare for all the lovely noble things he has put into his women's hearts and mouths, but surely for nothing more than for the words in which Juliet's reply is couched. Only one who knew of what a true woman is capable, in frankness, in courage, and self-surrender when her heart is possessed by a noble love, could have touched with such delicacy, such infinite charm of mingled reserve and artless frankness, the avowal of so fervent yet so modest a love, the

secret of which had been so strangely stolen from her. As the whole scene is the noblest pæan to Love ever written, so is what Juliet now says supreme in subtlety of feeling and expression, where all is beautiful. Watch all the fluctuations of emotion which pervade it and you will understand what a task is laid upon the actress to interpret them, not in voice and tone only, important as these are, but also in manner and in action. The generous frankness of the giving, the timid drawing back, fearful of having given too much unsought; the perplexity of the whole, all summed up in that sweet entreaty for pardon with which it closes. But I must quote the whole passage:—

“Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face,
 Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
 For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.
 Fain would I dwell on form ; fain, fain deny
 What I have spoke ; but farewell compliment !
 Dost thou love me ? I know thou wilt say ‘ Ay,’
 And I will take thy word : yet, if thou swear’st,
 Thou may’st prove false ; at lovers’ perjuries,
 They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
 If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully :
 Or if thou think’st I am too quickly won,
 I’ll frown and be perverse, and say thee nay,
 So thou wilt woo ; but else, not for the world.
 In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond ;
 And therefore thou may’st think my ’haviour light :
 But trust me, gentleman, I’ll prove more true
 Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
 I should have been more strange, I must confess,
 But that thou overheard’st, ere I was ware,
 My true love’s passion : therefore, pardon me,
 And not impute this yielding to light love,
 Which the dark night hath so discovered.”

I considered this speech one of the most difficult in the play, and loved and dreaded it equally, always fearing to do too much or too little in it. Indeed, the whole scene is a very anxious and a very fatiguing one.

How much must Romeo have felt the contrast between the gentle, ardent, yet deprecating tones he listens to so rapturously, and the unsympathetic voice in which the haughty Rosaline had told him she thought it virtue to give nought in return for love !

What was her cold beauty to that which he was now watching in the waning moonlight ! And here, too, there was so much besides the beautiful outside ; the frank innocence, the boundless generosity which told of the noble sweetness of the inner nature ! He is spell-bound into silence, and cannot break the music of those words that flood his heart with happiness, until Juliet, by asking him not to think lightly of a love so frankly expressed, binds him to her by a tie never to be sundered. That passionate childlike loving queens her in his sight, and makes him her slave for ever. To his eyes, "being o'er his head," she appears as "a winged messenger of heaven." He would make the pure chaste moon, as being most like to her, the goddess to bear witness to his vows — "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear——" But Juliet interrupts, and will not let him swear by

"the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable."

He asks—"What shall I swear by?" She answers—

"Do not swear at all ;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee."

Oh the rich resonance of those words ! What scope they give the actress, by her delivery of them, to mark the enthusiasm and the devotion of Juliet's nature which is so soon to develop into the heroic constancy which carries her, alone and unsupported, through a trial more fearful than death itself !

Suddenly she thinks that such joy as this cannot be lasting, —that this contract between them is

"too rash, too unadvised, too sudden ;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be,
Ere one can say 'It lightens.'"

But such a reflection is only momentary, for she directly adds—

"Sweet, good night !
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet ;"

and to prove that no disturbing thoughts have real place within her, says, as she turns to leave him—

“As sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart, as that within my breast!”

Naturally anxious to delay the parting, Romeo detains Juliet by the entreaty—

“O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?”

Jul. What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

Rom. The exchange of thy love’s faithful vow for mine.”

How charming is what follows!—

“I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.”

Romeo tremblingly asks—

“Would’st thou withdraw it? for what purpose, love?”

Jul. But to be frank, and give it thee again. . . .

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.”

At this moment the Nurse, awakening, misses Juliet and calls to her; on which, fearing the house may be disturbed and her love in danger, she bids Romeo a hasty adieu, with an eager admonition to “be true.” Then, as it may be only the Nurse that has awoken, she adds,—“Stay but a little, I will come again.” When left alone, Romeo cannot believe his happiness:—

“I am afeard,
Being in night, all this is but a dream,
Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.”

So marked a change takes place in Juliet’s manner and words on her return, that we are led to suppose the Nurse may have questioned her on what she thought of Paris and of her approaching marriage with him. From such talk she breaks hastily away, and knowing how little likelihood there was of another meeting with her lover without more peril to his life—dreading also that her parents may force her into an immediate marriage with Paris,

and having now no time to explain anything, she is obliged to say to Romeo abruptly, in "three words"—

"If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite;
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,
And follow thee, my lord, throughout the world."

Here the Nurse again calls—

"Madam !

Jul. I come, anon.—But if thou mean'st not well,
I do beseech thee——"

Another interruption comes from the Nurse, to which Juliet, almost past patience, cries—

"By and by, I come :—
To cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief."

Romeo has only time to say, "So thrive my soul," when Juliet leaves him with "A thousand times good night!" The Nurse must have been quieted by what Juliet has imparted to her; for when, after Romeo's reluctant steps have taken him to some little distance, and Juliet comes back again to the balcony, there is no further interruption from her. Thinking Romeo gone, Juliet wishes

"Oh, for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again !"

The "silver-sweet" voice reaches his attending ear "like softest music," and brings him instantly back.

Why has she stolen forth again? Partly to learn the hour when she is to send to him—partly for the fond pleasure of listening to some few more words of that "tongue's utterance." Presently she says, "I have forgot why I did call thee back." Had she forgotten anything? I think not. Only bewildered with her happiness—that "sweet repose and rest" which she found within her heart—she thought she had, and owns that she *shall*

"forget, to have thee still stand there,
Remembering how I love thy company."

Romeo will gladly stay—"Forgetting any other home but this"; but the "night's cloak" can no longer conceal him. "'Tis almost morning." They must separate. Juliet leaves him with—

"Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say—good night, till it be morrow.

Rom. Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!—
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!"

Romeo wants no sleep. His satisfied heart needs no refreshment. While yet

"The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,"

he seeks the cell of Friar Laurence, who would appear to be the Confessor of both families. Upon his "Good-morrow, father!" the Friar asks, "What early tongue so sweet saluteth me?" Romeo amazes the holy man by his confession that he has forgot the name of Rosaline, and explains how his

"heart's dear love is set
On the fair daughter of rich Capulet.

When, and where, and how
We met, we woo'd, and made exchange of vow,
I'll tell thee as we pass; but this I pray,
That thou consent to marry us to-day.

Friar. Holy Saint Francis! what a change is here!"

Romeo is made to listen to a homily for this fickleness; but the Friar ends with consenting to his request, under the impression that the marriage may possibly bring to a conclusion the long feud between their families.

"For this alliance may so happy prove,
To turn your households' rancour to pure love."

Juliet, meanwhile, has had to take the Nurse fully into her confidence. The notion of a marriage, and a secret one, in which she herself has to play an important part, delights the heart of this conceited, silly woman. She gladly undertakes to be Juliet's messenger, and finds Romeo at the appointed hour with his friends Mercutio and Benvolio. Before

her entrance, we see how entirely Romeo has cast aside the languor of the love-sick youth of the day before. When rallied by the brilliant Mercutio on his giving them "the slip" the previous night, he turns the tables on him—gives him jest for jest, so that this glib-tongued gentleman, "who loves to hear himself talk," has to call in Benvolio to help him—"Come between us, good Benvolio; my wits faint." Upon still getting the worst from Romeo, he says, "Why, is not this better now than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable; now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature." Mercutio, after wasting some of his wit on the Nurse, quits the scene with Benvolio. The Nurse, exceedingly angered and indignant at Mercutio, can hardly be brought to give to Romeo, who does all he can to soothe her, the message from her mistress—"what she bade me say, I will keep to myself;" but Romeo's fair words and a handsome *douceur*, which she takes after a little coquetting, bring her round, and an appointment is made for her lady to come that afternoon to Friar Laurence's cell, there to be "shrived and married." Romeo also directs her to meet his man behind the abbey wall, and to get from him "cords made like a tackled stair," by which he may after dark ascend to the chamber of his bride. Before she consents to this, she is shrewd enough to require satisfaction on a very material point:—

"Is your man secret? Did you ne'er hear say,
Two may keep counsel, putting one away?"

We may believe that the Nurse, loving much her own ease, has not, on this hot day, made her best haste back to Juliet. We hear she has been "three long hours" away—a period for which her short interview with Romeo could hardly account. We do not wonder, therefore, at Juliet's impatience. When at last the Nurse comes, Juliet can get but little from her. The Nurse feels that she is mistress of the situation, and will make the most of it. She is "a-weary"; her "bones ache"; she must have "leave awhile"; she will not speak to the point—"Do you not see that I am out of breath?"

"*Jul.* How art thou out of breath, when thou hast breath
To say to me that thou art out of breath ?

Is thy news good or bad ? answer to that ;
Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance."

The Nurse remembering, no doubt, Romeo's handsome gift, now bursts into an eulogium upon him. He is in all points "past compare." Then the fear of having lost her dinner startles her—"What ! have you dined at home ?" "No, no."

Although at another time Juliet could never weary of hearing the praises of her lover, yet now a much more urgent matter is in hand.

"But all this did I know before ;
What says he of our marriage ? what of that ?"

The selfish nature of the Nurse is here shown by the way she keeps Juliet in suspense, and therefore we cannot much wonder at the light in which she appears afterwards. It is for ever herself, herself—"Lord, how my head aches !" then her back,—reproaching Juliet for the time she has herself wasted "with jaunting up and down."

When Juliet has pitied and petted her enough, she thinks she has brought her to the point ; but just as she is touching it, the Nurse breaks off again with, "Where is your mother ?" At this, Juliet's patience gives way, and she replies angrily—

"Why, she is within ;
Where should she be ? How oddly thou repliest !"

thereby only giving the Nurse fresh weapons to torment her. Juliet sees that she must still be humoured ; and here occurs one of those passages which, with unerring instinct, Shakespeare leaves the performer to fill up by action—words being quite inadequate to carry on the scene. The caressing, winning kisses and loving ways of Juliet gradually subdue her tormentor. By this time, too, perhaps the thought of dinner becomes uppermost in the Nurse's mind ; and in reply to Juliet's question, "Come, what says Romeo ?" she replies, coming straight to the point at last—

"Have you got leave to go to shrift to-day ?
Jul. I have.

Nurse. Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence' cell ;—
There stays a husband to make you a wife.

Hie you to church ;
Go ; I'll to dinner ; hie you to the cell."

"Hie to high fortune!—honest Nurse, farewell!" exclaims Juliet, as with happy throbbing heart she hastens away to celebrate the rite which frees her from Paris, gives her to her lover, and after which she will be ready "to follow him throughout the world."

No need to dwell on the short scene which follows, when the lovers meet at Friar Laurence's cell, where the poet shows what countless wealth of love each is ready to bestow upon the other. No forebodings now from either. The "bud of love" seems swiftly to have grown into a "beauteous flower" unhindered. The swifter blighting to follow is hidden for that blessed moment from them. The Friar, fearing these supposed enemies should be seen together at his cell, hurries them away into his chapel to perform the marriage rite ; and "holy church incorporates two in one." After the Friar's benediction they part ; but only until the moon shall be "touching with silver all the fruit-tree tops," and the nightingale shall again be "trilling her thick-warbled note" from the pomegranate-tree in a low sweet epithalamium. Why should their bliss be dashed by fear? They have both entire faith in the Friar, in his power to help them, and in good time to reconcile their friends to the marriage. He must look forward to this himself, or he would not otherwise have consented to it. Their parting, therefore, is as full of joy as their meeting had been, though of a more subdued and holier kind.

Alas for their next meeting! All seems fair ; but Destiny now begins her woful work in earnest, and chooses her first victim in the person of the gallant, gay, high-spirited Mercutio, who is strolling along in the hot noonday, despite the remonstrances of his friend Benvolio.

"The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And, if we meet, we shall not 'scape a brawl ;
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring."

Presently comes Tybalt seeking Romeo, in order to insult and challenge him for having intruded the previous night into his uncle's house. Mercutio tries to provoke him to an encounter, but Tybalt will have none of him. At that moment Mercutio is not the man he seeks. For such a hot-blooded young gentleman he shows wondrous forbearance under Mercutio's taunts, and ends with, "Well, peace be with you, sir! here comes my man," as he catches sight of Romeo, who is coming straight from the Friar's cell after the celebration of his marriage. In this mood the world to him is full of love and amity, even the insulting address of Tybalt cannot move him. Besides, is Tybalt not the kinsman of his love? To a coarse greeting he replies with dignity and kindness—

"Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting: villain am I none;
Therefore, farewell; I see thou know'st me not."

Romeo's gentleness, even under renewed provocation, takes away the sting of Tybalt's wrath. He cannot as a gentleman add still further insult, but must perforce, for the time, be satisfied. Mercutio, however, who knows none of Romeo's reasons for desiring to be at peace with the Capulets, calls this a "dishonourable, vile submission," and feels that he must, on his own part, wipe out the discredit with his sword. He turns furiously on Tybalt, and in a second their swords are tilting at each other's breasts. Calling on his friend Benvolio to help him, and reminding the combatants that "the prince expressly hath forbidden bandying in Verona streets," Romeo interposes and beats up their weapons. This gives Tybalt an opportunity to inflict a wound on Mercutio under Romeo's arm,—after which he leaves the scene with his followers. Mercutio knows at once that he has received his death-stroke—

"I am hurt;—
A plague o' both your houses!—I am sped:—
'Is he gone, and hath nothing?'"

With all his pain he never loses his wit and spirit. Romeo says:—

"Courage, man ; the hurt cannot be much.

Mer. No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door ; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve. Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world.

Help me into some house, Benvolio,
Or I shall faint. A plague o' both your houses !
They have made worms' meat of me."

All the dismal consequences of this disaster, of which he is the innocent cause, at once flash upon Romeo.

"This gentleman, the prince's near ally,
My very friend, hath got his mortal hurt
In my behalf ; my reputation stain'd
By Tybalt's slander—Tybalt, that an hour
Hath been my kinsman ! O sweet Juliet,
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,
And in my temper soften'd valour's steel !"

Unluckily, while Romeo's grief is at its height, on hearing from Benvolio that Mercutio is dead, Tybalt comes back upon the scene. At the sight of the slayer of his friend, even Juliet is forgotten ; and rushing with fury upon Tybalt, who has again insulted him with taunting words, Romeo kills him, and is hurried from the scene by Benvolio as the citizens rush in, presently to be followed by the Prince of Verona with the heads of both the rival houses.

The Prince, who has so lately issued his decree that, if either of the conflicting factions should again disturb the quiet of the streets, "their life shall pay the forfeit," upon hearing from Benvolio the provocation under which Romeo fought, is moved to pronounce a milder sentence—

"Let Romeo hence in haste,
Else, when he's found, that hour is his last.
Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill."

While all these disasters are taking place, Juliet, entirely unconscious of the difference in her fate, is revelling in joyful anticipation of the approach of night, which shall bring back Romeo :—

"Come, night!—Come, Romeo! come, thou day in night!
 For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
 Whiter than new snow on a raven's back.
 Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-brow'd night,
 Give me my Romeo: and, when he shall die,
 Take him and cut him out in little stars,
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
 That all the world will be in love with night,
 And pay no worship to the garish sun.

.

So tedious is this day,
 As is the night before some festival
 To an impatient child, that hath new robes,
 And may not wear them. O, here comes my nurse,
 And she brings news; and every tongue, that speaks
 But Romeo's name, speaks heavenly eloquence.—
 Now, nurse, what news?"

"Ah me! what news?" The cruel, tiresome Nurse will only wring her hands and say—

"Ah well-a-day! he's dead, he's dead, he's dead!
 We are undone, lady, we are undone!
 Alack the day!—he's gone, he's kill'd, he's dead!"

Juliet, naturally believing that Romeo has fallen by her kinsman's hand,—thinking too of the "little stars" which, she has just said, will at his death "make the face of heaven so fine," cries out—

"Can heaven be so envious?
Nurse. Romeo can,
 Though heaven cannot. O Romeo, Romeo!—
 Who ever would have thought it?—Romeo?"

Maddened by these exclamations, which contain no explanation, Juliet cries—

"What devil art thou, that dost torment me thus?¹
 This torture should be roar'd in dismal hell.
 Hath Romeo slain himself?"

Not even the anguish Juliet shows at the bare thought moves this heartless creature, who goes maundering on—

¹ See Appendix, p. 397.

"I saw the wound, I saw it with mine eyes,—
 God save the mark!—here on his manly breast
 A piteous corse, a bloody piteous corse;
 Pale, pale as ashes."

Then Juliet asks no more questions—

"O break, my heart!—poor bankrupt, break at once!
 End motion here:
 And thou, and Romeo, press one heavy bier!"

When the Nurse continues—

"O Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had!

 That ever I should live to see thee dead!"

—Juliet, seeing only more perplexity, more grief, exclaims—

"Is Romeo slaughtered? and is Tybalt dead?
 My dear-loved cousin, and my dearer lord?"

At last comes the dismal truth—

"Tybalt is gone, and Romeo banished;
 Romeo that kill'd him, he is banished."

In horror Juliet asks—

"Did Romeo's hand shed Tybalt's blood?
Nurse. It did, it did; alas the day, it did!"

This bare fact, without the circumstances attending it, naturally shocks Juliet; she exclaims—

"O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
 O, that deceit should dwell
 In such a gorgeous palace!"

Then follows the Nurse's vulgar diatribe against the male sex—

"There's no trust,
 No faith, no honesty in men; all perjured,
 All forsworn, all naught, all dissemblers.

 Shame come to Romeo!"

This word applied to Romeo arouses a fiery indignation in Juliet, who turns upon her instantly with—

“Blister’d be thy tongue
 For such a wish ! he was not born to shame ;
 Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit ;
 For ’tis a throne where honour may be crown’d
 Sole monarch of the universal earth.”

Amazed at such a rebuke from one whom she has till now been treating merely as a child, the Nurse can but feebly ask—

“Will you speak well of him that kill’d your cousin ?
Jul. Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband ?”

In Juliet’s answer we see that her intellect was as clear, her sense of duty in the position she had chosen as vivid, as her feelings were quick and strong.

“Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,
 When I, thy three hours’ wife, have mangled it ?”

Whoever is to blame, it cannot be her lord. She drives away her tears at the remembrance that her

“husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain ;
 And Tybalt’s dead, that would have slain my husband :
 All this is comfort ; wherefore weep I then ?”

Memory now brings back the dreadful word, which she would fain forget, “that murdered her.”

“‘Tybalt is dead, and Romeo banished ;’
 That ‘banished,’ that one word ‘banished,’
 Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts.”

The very Nurse is touched by a depth of grief such as she had never seen, could hardly understand, and she tries to find some means of consolation.

“Hie to your chamber : I’ll find Romeo
 To comfort you :—I wot well where he is.
 Hark ye, your Romeo will be here at night :
 I’ll to him ; he is hid at Laurence’ cell.
Jul. O, find him ! give this ring to my true knight,
 And bid him come to take his last farewell.”

No word of blame, although he has killed her kinsman and destroyed their joint happiness ! She even sends a ring, as if

desirous to bind herself more closely to him, and betroth herself anew in their affliction.

Juliet's despair has its counterpart in that of Romeo, as we next see him at the Friar's cell; nay, if not deeper, it is wilder in its expression, when he learns from the Friar's lips the Prince's sentence—

“Not body's death, but body's banishment.

Rom. Be merciful, say ‘death’;
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death: do not say ‘banishment.’”

Vainly does the Friar try to press upon him his

“Rude unthankfulness.

Thy fault our law calls death; but the kind prince,
Taking thy part, hath rush'd aside the law
And turn'd that black word death to banishment:
This is dear mercy, and thou seest it not.

Rom. 'Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here,
Where Juliet lives.”

The Friar can neither dispute with him on his estate, nor bring “adversity's sweet milk, philosophy,” to help him.

“*Rom.* Yet ‘banished’?—Hang up philosophy!
Useless philosophy can make a Juliet,
Displant a town, reverse a prince's doom,
It helps not, it prevails not; talk no more.”

Not even the arrival of the Nurse, as Juliet's messenger, can arouse him from the frenzy of grief in which he has flung himself upon the ground, “taking the measure of an unmade grave.” When he becomes conscious of her presence, and learns the state of his mistress, since he has “stained the childhood of their joy with blood removed but little from her own,” his first impulse is to draw his sword and destroy himself. But now the Friar's language rises to a higher strain:—

“Art thou a man? thy form cries out, thou art:
Thy tears are womanish; thy wild acts denote
The unreasonable fury of a beast.

.
I thought thy disposition better temper'd.
Hast thou slain Tybalt? wilt thou slay thyself?

And slay thy lady too that lives in thee,
By doing damnèd hate upon thyself?

What, rouse thee, man ! thy Juliet is alive.
For whose dear sake thou wast but lately dead :
There art thou happy : Tybalt would kill thee,
But thou slew'st Tybalt ; there art thou happy too :
The law, that threaten'd death, becomes thy friend,
And turns it into exile ; there art thou happy :
A pack of blessings lights upon thy back."

Juliet's clear intellect quickly absolves Romeo from blame for having slain Tybalt, "that would have slain her husband"; but the Friar has to reason this out for Romeo, who is too generous to find excuses for himself. The Friar, moreover, proves no mere preacher of what the Nurse calls "good counsel." He is also a man of action. He bids Romeo keep the meeting with his bride.

"Go, get thee to thy love, as was decreed,
Ascend her chamber, hence and comfort her :
But look thou stay not till the watch be set,
For then thou canst not pass to Mantua,"

where he is to live until the Friar can find a time, which he does not doubt of finding soon, to make the marriage known, reconcile the lover's parents, turn by this "their households' rancour to pure love," and so secure the Prince's pardon and Romeo's recall.

"Go before, nurse : commend me to thy lady ;
And bid her hasten all the house to bed,
Which heavy sorrow makes them apt unto :
Romeo is coming."

The Friar, who knows human nature in all its varieties, proves a most wise and comforting counsellor to Romeo. But his sagacity has no power to foresee what is now going on in the house of the Capulets to upset all his plans for the present and future happiness of the lovers. Remembering that it is already very late and the night setting in, he suggests to Romeo that, if he cannot get away from his interview with Juliet before the watch is set, he should depart in disguise by the break of day. He promises that he will find out Romeo's man, and sig-

nify through him "from time to time every good hap to you that chances here." Romeo, repentant and deeply grateful, leaves him, saying—

"But that a joy past joy calls out on me,
It were a grief so soon to part with thee :
Farewell !"

Shakespeare shows his wondrous skill in dramatic construction by the brief scene which he interposes here between Lord and Lady Capulet and Paris. They have been discussing the projected marriage of their daughter, which Paris is there to press, and have been sitting late in counsel. The result is, that Lord Capulet has determined it shall take place :—

"Sir Paris, I will make a desperate tender
Of my child's love : I think she will be ruled
In all respects by me ; nay more, I doubt it not."

To his wife, who has said she will know Juliet's mind early to-morrow, as "to-night she's mew'd up to her heaviness," he says—

"Wife, go you to her ere you go to bed ;
Acquaint her here of my son Paris' love.
.
.
.
O' Thursday, tell her,
She shall be married to this noble earl ;"—

quite ignoring what he has said early in the play—

"But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart,
My will to her consent is but a part ;
An she agree, within her scope of choice
Lies my consent and fair according voice."

Poor Juliet ! She is to be no exception to the truth, that troubles never come singly. That which is now in store goes far deeper than even the anguish of parting from her lover-husband. This is a woful night indeed !—this so-longed-for, much-entreated, gentle, "loving, black-brow'd night" !

What a prelude is this scene of cold, worldly disposing of hearts and lives to that now enacting between the lovers, which Shakespeare makes to take place on the very balcony or *loggia* which was consecrated by the first avowal of their love ! In

that meeting what extremes of rapture and of anguish! The hour of parting has arrived. Juliet has of late been too much absorbed in their love and their woe to give a thought to the suit of Paris; but in this sad hour the remembrance of it must doubtless have come upon her, and seemed to separate her still further from her husband. She will not add to the burthen of his grief by confiding to him this new trial, and all the persecution it may bring upon her. All is bad enough without this dread apprehension; yet it adds a special terror to his going. It cannot be that day is so near at hand. The same nightingale, whose song had sounded so sweetly in their ears the previous night, has been singing in the same pomegranate-tree. Yet how different the sound! And now another strain strikes harshly on their ears. The lark, the herald of the morn, is carolling its glad note as it "mounts up on high." How cruel is its joy! Their days will all seem nights until they meet again. Seeing that

"Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain-tops,"

Romeo sadly says—"I must be gone and live, or stay and die." Juliet will not believe in the so rapid approach of day. They seem hardly to have met.

"Yon light is not daylight; . . .
It is some meteor that the sun exhales,
To be to thee this night a torch-bearer,
And light thee on thy way to Mantua:
Therefore stay yet, thou need'st not to be gone."

Romeo, willing to risk all in order to remain even for a short time near her, exclaims—

"I'll say, yon grey is not the morning's eye;
.
Nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads.
.
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.
How is't, my soul? let's talk, it is not day."

At the word "*death*," Juliet at once realises the risk he is running, and hurries him away—"O, now be gone; more light and light it grows." The Nurse comes to caution them that the "day

is broke," and to tell Juliet that her lady mother is coming to her chamber.

Oh the cry of the poor forlorn heart when Romeo has descended the ladder of ropes and she sees him there, where the day before he had looked up in the rapture of hope under the same grey morning light! "Art thou gone so, love, lord?—ay, husband, friend!" Ever, when I acted this scene, these words came from me like the cry of my own heart, and all that followed seemed the very voice of my own "ill-divining soul."

Jul. O, think'st thou we shall ever meet again?

Rom. I doubt it not; and all these woes shall serve
For sweet discourses in our time to come.

Jul. O God! I have an ill-divining soul:
Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb."

And it is only thus that her eyes ever again behold him!

To add to her almost intolerable misery, now comes in her mother, who shows some surprise at finding her daughter up at so late an hour, and drowned in tears. "Why, how now, Juliet?" "Madam, I am not well." No sympathy comes from the cold mother, who only says, somewhat sarcastically—

"Evermore weeping for your cousin's death?

What, wilt thou wash him from his grave with tears?

Well, well, thou hast a careful father, child—

One who, to put thee from thy heaviness,

Hath sorted out a sudden day of joy.

That thou expect'st not, nor I look'd not for.

. Early next Thursday morn,

The gallant, young, and noble gentleman,

The County Paris, at St Peter's church,

Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride."

Juliet, affrighted, amazed at this sudden woe and peril, replies angrily—

"Now, by St Peter's church, and Peter too,

He shall not make me there a joyful bride.

I wonder at this haste; that I must wed

Ere he, that should be husband, comes to woo.

I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam,

I will not marry yet."

Capulet, a little doubtful how his young daughter may take the news of these hasty nuptials, but not questioning her assent in the end, now enters her chamber with the Nurse. To his amazement, his wife tells him that Juliet will not hear of the marriage—"she will none" of it, adding, "I would the fool were married to her grave!" Does she think of this hereafter? Capulet's indignation knows no bounds.

"Is she not proud? doth she not count her blest,
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought
So worthy a gentleman to be her bridegroom?"

Juliet on her knees entreats her father to hear her "with patience but to speak a word." But he grows hotter and hotter at finding determined opposition where he had looked for little. The Nurse is rebuked for taking Juliet's part and saying, "You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so." "And why, my lady wisdom? Hold your tongue!" And he leaves Juliet with this threat—

"Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn."

Juliet in her anguish cries out—

"Is there no pity sitting in the clouds,
That sees into the bottom of my grief?"

Then turns to her mother with the piteous appeal—

"O, sweet my mother, cast me not away!
Delay this marriage for a month, a week;
Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies!"

Prophetic words, which might well have startled the formal mother's ears; but she replies in feeble imitation of her husband, and in language which sounds more shocking than his, because not spoken in hot passion—

"Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word;
Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee."

And now the Nurse alone remains. She at least is sure. She is her own, and never could desert the foster-child, whom she nursed, that took the place of her own Susan, "who is with God." Juliet turns to her as her last but certain comforter:—

"O nurse, how shall this be prevented?

Alack, alack, that heaven should practise stratagems
Upon so soft a subject as myself!

What say'st thou? hast thou not a word of joy?
Some comfort, nurse!"

Alas for Juliet! Comfort from a creature so shallow-hearted, so selfish, so untrue! We see that the Nurse has been pondering over the situation. The parents are not to be moved. To confess to them the part she has played in the secret marriage is not to be thought of. She would lose the home which she looks upon as her own for life, and be sent from it in disgrace. This young girl cannot help her; why should she, therefore, risk comfort and respectability on her account? She knows nothing of the sympathy of soul with soul—of the heaven-given impulse, which has drawn the lovers together; the love "that looks on tempests and is never shaken"; the feeling that in Juliet consecrates her person, as it has bound her soul, to Romeo. No! The conclusion she comes to and the counsel she gives is, that Romeo

"Is banished: and all the world to nothing,
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the county."

Then, to reassure and encourage Juliet, as she stands in dumb astonishment—

"O, he's a lovely gentleman!
. . . An eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye,
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first."

All my blood seemed to be forced back upon my heart as I listened to these words. I grew as stone when she went on

to descant upon the praises of Paris in contrast with Romeo. What can be said in answer to such words, such comfort, such counsel? I have often been startled at the sad solemnity of my own tones, as I put the question, "Speakest thou from thy heart?" and in the very significant "Amen!" which follows her reply—"From my soul too; or else beshrew them both."

Juliet's hope, her trust in the one on whose devotion she felt assured she might rely, is at an end, and now she sees, as she had never seen before, the Nurse's character altogether in its true light. Stolid as the Nurse is, and incapable of any finer feeling, yet we see, by her startled "What? what?" that she notes the difference in Juliet's tone and manner. For the first time Juliet assumes her position as mistress towards her, and after the half-ironical "Well, thou hast comforted me marvellous much," orders her to go in and tell her mother that she has gone, having displeased her father, to Friar Laurence's cell, "to make confession, and to be absolved."

Alas, again, for Juliet! The familiar ground which she has trodden, to which she has trusted all her life, taken from under her, and she left standing alone—cast off by all within her home! Worse than cast away by the Nurse, who knows all her trouble, and would have her meet it in this despicable manner! She makes no remonstrance: no further appeal could be made to such a creature. Her tears are dried, and she stands erect in her desolation. Alone she must face the future—a future steeped in gloom. The child's trust in others falls from her: "her soul springs up astonished—springs full-statured in an hour." She is henceforth the determined woman. She will not condescend to bandy more words with the Nurse—who, being incapable of understanding her nature, does not deserve her consideration—yet when alone her pent-up indignation and scorn find a way to her lips:—

"O most wicked fiend!

Is it more sin to wish me thus forsworn,
Or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue
Which she hath praised him with above compare
So many thousand times? Go, counsellor;
Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain."

Whatever happens, their lives are henceforth separate. Rather

than follow such counsel she will destroy herself! In this supreme moment she has formed her resolution. "I'll to the Friar, to know his remedy." Then remembering and possessing herself of the dagger, which had been the toy of her happy hours, she adds—

"If all else fail, myself have power to die."

It is for the actress, in this marvellous and most difficult scene, to show, by her look and manner, how everything that is girlish and immature,—everything that, under happy circumstances, would have marked the gentle clinging nature of youth,—falls off from Juliet,—how she is transfigured into the heroic woman just as Romeo, when possessed by a genuine passion, rises from the dreaming youth to the full stature of a noble manhood.

This difference is plainly marked in her dignified treatment of Paris, whom she finds before her at the Friar's cell. The Nurse's praises, still sounding in her ears, make him particularly unwelcome to her. He evidently thinks her father's sanction to their marriage is all-sufficient, and with self-complacent impertinence treats her as though she were already his property. Juliet's curt and somewhat sarcastic answers to his questions should have shown him how distasteful he was to her; but he believes in himself as an acceptable suitor to any lady. Even her evident impatience to get rid of him tells him nothing. He chooses to believe that her confession to the Friar is partly made on his account.

Par. Do not deny to him that you love me.

Jul. I will confess to you that I love him.

Par. So will you, I am sure, that you love me."

After a little more of this fencing, Juliet, seeing that he will not leave them, turns to the Friar—"Are you at leisure, holy father, now?" Such a hint cannot but be taken, and Paris leaves her with the promise—

"Juliet, on Thursday early will I rouse you :
Till then, adieu !"

No sooner is the door shut upon him, than she finds that

through Paris the Friar is already acquainted with her grief; "it strains me," he says, "past the compass of my wits." The Friar can hardly be prepared to find how rapidly the extremity which has so suddenly come upon Juliet has developed her character. The determined resolute composure which she shows could alone have encouraged him to suggest to her the desperate remedy which is the only "kind of hope" he has to offer her.

"*Jul.* God join'd my heart and Romeo's, thou our hands ;
And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo seal'd,
Shall be the label to another deed,
Or my true heart with treacherous revolt
Turn to another, this shall slay them both.
Be not so long to speak ; I long to die,
If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy."

The Friar must see how ready she is to sacrifice the life consecrated to her lover ; and he at once explains that the only escape he had been able to devise was a desperate and terrible one. But if she be prepared, as she says, to face death itself, she may not hesitate to undertake "a thing like death to chide away this shame."

In her answer Juliet proclaims with passionate vehemence her readiness to face such terrors as he might think would affright her most, if only she may live "an unstained wife to her sweet love." There is such proof of earnest purpose in this, that the Friar no longer hesitates to lay his device before her. She is in no way appalled by the thought of being laid for dead for a certain time in her ancestral tomb. Is she not assured that by the time she will awake, her Romeo, summoned by the Friar, will be by her side, and bear her thence "that very night to Mantua" ?

"If no unconstant toy, nor womanish fear,
Abate thy valour in the acting it."

"Give me, give me ! O tell me not of fear," she exclaims, as she seizes the phial ; "Love give me strength !" What strength love gives her we are soon to see—love true and unwavering as that she plighted in the words—

"But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange."

Lord Capulet, unused to be thwarted, must be in a fever of impatience to know what effect the Friar's admonitions have had upon his wayward daughter, in whom he now traces some of his own imperious will. His surprise and delight, therefore, know no bounds when she returns apparently contrite and ready to obey his wish—nay, as willing as himself to expedite matters.

"Send for the county ; go tell him of this :
I'll have this knot knit up to-morrow morning.

Now, afore God, this reverend holy friar,
All our whole city is much bound up in him."

Juliet says—

"Nurse, will you go with me into my closet,
To help me sort such needful ornaments
As you think fit to furnish me to-morrow ?"

Lady Capulet, wishing to keep to the original day, breaks in with—"No, not till Thursday ; there is time enough." Lord Capulet, most anxious to take Juliet while in the vein, exclaims, "Go, Nurse, go with her ; we'll to church to-morrow." Still Lady Capulet remonstrates—

"We shall be short in our provision ;
'Tis now near night.

Cap. Tush ! I will stir about,
And all things shall be well, I warrant, wife ;
Go thou to Juliet, help to deck her up ;
I'll not to bed to-night.

My heart is wondrous light,
Since this same wayward girl is so reclaim'd."

Juliet is now in her chamber, and has let the Nurse choose any dress she pleases for the intended ceremony on the morrow. "Ay, those attires are best." The same, doubtless, that she was really robed in for her grave. She must be at peace now, even with the treacherous woman who had so failed her in her utmost need, for this is their last meeting. She asks the Nurse to leave her—

“For I have need of many orisons
To move the heavens to smile upon my state,
Which, well thou know’st, is cross and full of sin.”

Lady Capulet comes in to inquire if her help is needed. Juliet replies that all is ready, and asks to be left alone, adding—

“And let the nurse this night sit up with you ;
For, I am sure, you have your hands full all
In this so sudden business.”

Lady Capulet, who sees nothing in her daughter’s change of manner but what she considers natural in the situation—wrought in her, doubtless, by the good Friar’s spiritual advice and counsel—bids her “good night” in the usual way, only adding, as she knew Juliet had been waking and weeping all the previous night, “Get thee to bed, and rest ; for thou hast need.”

With what awe, with what dread fascination, I used to approach what follows ! I always felt a kind of icy coldness and stillness come over me after leaving the Friar’s cell which lasted until this moment. The “Farewell !” to Lady Capulet, —“God knows when we shall meet again,”—relaxed this state of tension. When I knelt to my father, I had mutely, in kissing his hand, taken leave of him ; but now my mother—the mother whose sympathy would have been so precious—was leaving me to my lonely despair. This breaking up of all the natural ties of youth and home, the heart-sick feeling of desolation, overpowered me, and sobs came against my will. The very room looked strange, larger, darker, with but the faint light of the lamp, which threw the recesses of the windows and the heavy furniture into deeper shade. I used to lift the lamp from the table and peer into the shadows, to try to take away their terror. Already I could fancy I had descended into the vault.

“I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life.”

There was no enduring it : “I’ll call them back again to comfort me ;—Nurse !” No ! I have forgot. “What should she do here ?” No one must know,—“my dismal scene I needs must act alone.” Hitherto all has been as the Friar ordered : his instructions have been faithfully carried out. Now Juliet stands,

for the first time, alone, to think over and to face what is to follow. She does not waver, but she has to put before herself the dread realities which must be encountered in the way of the escape devised for her. The hush of the unaccustomed solitude is strange, for the Nurse has been near her always until this night. Things undreamt of take possession of her brain. A swift, sudden death, such as she had pictured to the Friar, would have no terror; but slow horrors seem now to gather round her.

“What if this mixture do not work at all?
Shall I be married then to-morrow morning?”

No! There is a remedy against that. The dagger is kept near her heart, and will find its place in it if necessary. Then again, it may be a poison subtly administered by the Friar, lest he should be dishonoured, "because he married me before to Romeo." This thought is put aside at once as unworthy—"for he hath still been tried a holy man." But now imagination conjures up a much more terrible vision, and such as might appal the bravest heart:—

“How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me?”

This is indeed "a fearful point!" She has seen the outside of the family vault; the space remaining cannot be large, it being already full of her kindred, who have been buried there for "many hundred years." Remembering the custom of burying the corpse uncovered on the bier, to fall bit by bit into decay, the air, such air as may find its way in, laden with the odours of decaying mortality, may stifle her,—nay, the foul mouth of the vault is not large enough to let in the "healthsome air," and she will "there die strangled ere my Romeo comes." Or if not—if she should live—how is she to endure

"The horrible conceit of death and night,
Together with the terror of the place,—
.
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies festering in his shroud " ? ¹

¹ I could never utter these words without an exclamation of shuddering disgust escaping with them.

Horror accumulates upon horror. Wandering spirits resort to such spots. What with loathsome smells, the shrieks of man-drakes torn out of the earth, she will go mad

“Environed with all these hideous fears.

And in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains !”

For the moment the great fear gets the better of the great love, and all seems madness. Then in her frenzy of excitement she seems to see Tybalt's figure start into life—

“Look ! methinks I see my cousin's ghost

Seeking out Romeo ! . . .

Stay, Tybalt, stay !”

At the mention of Romeo's name, I used to feel all my resolution return. Romeo ! She goes to meet him, and what terror shall hold her back ? She will pass through the horror of hell itself to reach what lies beyond ; and she swallows the potion with his name upon her lips—“Romeo, I come ! this do I drink to thee !”

What a scene is this—so simple, so grand, so terrible ! What it is to act I need not tell you. What power it demands, and yet what restraint ! To be tame would be to make the words ridiculous. The voice must be as capable of variety of expression as are the words,—the action simple, earnest, impressive. Repetition, certainly, had no effect in making the scene less vivid to my imagination. The last time I played Juliet, which was in Manchester in 1871, I fainted on the bed at the end of it, so much was I overcome with the reality of the “thick-coming fancies,”—just as the first time I played the part I had fainted at the sight of my own blood, which, for the moment, seemed to make the scene all too real. I am not given to fainting, indeed I have very rarely known the sensation. But the fascination which the terrible had for me from the first, it maintained to the last ; and as the images which the poet suggests rose in cumulative horror before my mind, the stronger imagination of riper years gave them, no doubt, a still greater power over my nervous system, and for the

time overcame me. I know no scene in Shakespeare more difficult. Three such scenes for the actress in one play—the balcony scene, the scene when Juliet hears of Romeo's banishment, and this! Alas! who could hope to do them full justice?

While the daughter of the house is contending with the horrors that crowd on her imagination at the thought of the "nest of death, contagion, and unnatural sleep," in which she is presently to be laid, Shakespeare, with a true painter's eye for contrast, lets us see a little of the busy life which is in the meantime going on in the background through the night in the bustle of preparation for these hasty nuptials. Day is breaking, yet Capulet has not been in bed:—

"Come, stir, stir, stir! the second cock hath crow'd,
The curfew-bell hath rung, 'tis three o'clock."

While Lady Capulet and the Nurse are equally active in getting "spices and quinces" for the operations of the kitchen, servants are seen moving to and fro with spits, logs, and baskets—

Cap. Now, fellow, what's there?

First Servant. Things for the cook, sir; but I know not what.

Cap. Make haste, make haste! Sirrah, fetch drier logs.

The county will be here with music straight,
For so he said he would. I hear him near."

The Nurse is despatched in haste to Juliet to waken her, and "trim her up." All this stir and bustle of festal preparation, the prelude to the hushed solemnity of death! What a picture meets the eyes of the stricken parents, the faithless Nurse, the assured and triumphant bridegroom! Friar Laurence, knowing what he does of them and their poor victims, may well cut short their selfish lamentations by the words—

"The heavens do lour upon you for some ill,—
Move them no more by crossing their high will."

The close of the fourth act leaves us in uncertainty, but still with a kind of hope that all these woes may serve "for sweet discourses in the time to come." There seems to be no necessity for a tragic ending. Romeo is safe in Mantua, awaiting, with all

the patience he can command, the news which the Friar is to send him through his man from time to time of "every good hap that chances here." Friar John has been sent to him with all speed with a letter apprising him of what has just happened—a letter which will bring him back on the instant to Verona. Juliet is safe from her parents' importunity in the "pleasant sleep" which is to end in such a happy waking. All seems to go well.

But Destiny now steps in again. The fates are spinning, spinning out the doom of the lovers, and will not be thwarted.

The fifth act of this play has always impressed me as being wonderfully beautiful,—simple, human, and grand as the finest of the Greek plays; much finer, indeed—for the ancients knew nothing of the passion of love in its purity, its earnestness, its devotedness, its self-sacrifice. It needed Christianity to teach us this, and a Shakespeare in the drama to illustrate it. The Greek dramatists, as a rule, preserved the unities of time, place, and action. Shakespeare put them aside for higher purposes. His genius could not be so trammelled. Human lives and human minds he took to work upon, and made all outside matter subservient to his great end. Time, place, action, were his instruments, and he made them submit to him. He looked to the "beyond beyond," where no time is, and would not subject himself to mere days and hours, which at the best come and go unheeded, some flying, others dragging their weary length along.

In the opening of the act we meet Romeo in Mantua. Grief has matured, ennobled him. He is full of buoyant hopes because of a happy dream. In the first act, before he goes to the revels, he says, "'Tis no wit to go. I dream'd a dream to-night." This dream was of a kind evidently to set him against going to the house of his enemy. But, following on this dream of warning, comes the greatest joy of his life. The present dream supposes, curiously, that he, instead of his lady, was lying dead, and that her kisses breathed such new life into him that he "revived, and was an emperor." Now, in the climax of this joyful anticipation, comes Balthazar with news from Verona. Has he brought letters from the Friar? No. Then,

"How doth my lady? Is my father well?
How fares my Juliet? That I ask again,
For nothing can be ill, if she be well.

Bal. Then she is well, and nothing can be ill.
Her body sleeps in Capel's monument,
And her immortal part with angels lives.
I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault."

Romeo's grief is of that overwhelming kind which finds no vent in words. He simply says, "Is it even so? then I defy you, stars!" On the instant he sees his course. He gives a few brief directions to his servant to hire post-horses, and dismisses him with renewed injunctions—"and hire those horses; I'll be with thee straight." What a change the shock has wrought upon him in a moment is seen in Balthazar's words!—

"I do beseech you, sir, have patience;
Your looks are pale and wild."

Romeo asks no questions, seeks for no details. In the anguish of a sudden blow it is not the greatest sufferer who wants to know particulars. The "why?" the "when?" the "where?" come from others less deeply stricken. The thought may pass through Romeo's mind of the pale face he had last looked upon in the anguish of parting. "Dry sorrow" has indeed "drunk her blood" and snapped her life's strings.

"Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night.
Let's see for means. O mischief, thou art swift
To enter in the thoughts of desperate men!"

Swift—too swift; for already Destiny had thrown the means across his path.

"I do remember an apothecary
And hereabouts he dwells. . . .
Noting his penury, to myself I said—
And if a man did need a poison now,
. . . .
Here lives a caitiff wretch would sell it him.
O, this same thought did but forerun my need!
. . . .
Come, cordial, and not poison; go with me
To Juliet's grave, for there must I use thee.

With what a subtle touch Shakespeare reveals to us the state of Romeo's mind during his hurried night-ride to Verona! for, as an exiled man, he must still use "night's cloak" to hide him from men's eyes. His man, thinking the details of what had happened in Verona deeply interesting, would fain tell him all,—spare his master nothing of the elaborate ceremony which he had witnessed of Juliet's entombment, or of the gossip which he has heard around of the unusual sadness of the event—of her youth, her beauty, and of the day on which she died having been appointed for her marriage with the rich County Paris. But Romeo heeds nothing. One all-absorbing thought possesses him—to hasten on and lie by Juliet's side in death.

The next scene shows us how the Fates have been at work, using the plague which was then raging in part of Verona as an instrument of their will. Friar John, while seeking the "associate" who was to accompany him to Verona, is found in a house suspected of infection, and is shut up there, so that he can neither send on to Mantua the letter intrusted to him, nor get it returned to Friar Laurence. He brings it back after this delay, when the time for it to be of use has gone by. "Unhappy fortune!" says Friar Laurence; but as he evidently thought Romeo could not have heard what had happened through any other channel, he proposes to write again to him, and in the meantime to bring Juliet away on her awaking, and keep her at his cell.

On Romeo's arrival at the churchyard, he finds Paris there before him, strewing the tomb with flowers. Paris has loved Juliet to the best of his nature, and mourns her in a gentle sentimental way:—

"Sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew :
The obsequies that I for thee will keep,
Nightly shall be, to strew thy grave and weep."

He retires when his page warns him of the approach of Romeo; but on witnessing what he supposes to be desecration of the tomb of the Capulets, he breaks in with—

"Stop thy unhallow'd toil, vile Montague !
Condemned villain, I do apprehend thee !"

Romeo proves his gentle, noble nature by showing the same forbearance to Paris with which he had met the insolence of Tybalt:—

“Good gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man;
Fly hence and leave me. . . .
I beseech thee, youth,
Put not another sin upon my head,
By urging me to fury!—O, begone!
By heaven, I love thee better than myself:
For I come hither arm'd against myself.”

Paris will not be persuaded, and Romeo is not to be balked. They fight, and it is only when Paris has fallen that he is recognised by Romeo as “Mercutio's kinsman, noble County Paris.” Then something crosses his mind as to what his man had talked of on the road—

“When my betossed soul
Did not attend him as we rode. I think,
He told me, Paris should have married Juliet:
Said he not so? or did I dream it so?
Or am I mad, hearing him talk of Juliet,
To think it was so?”

To the man who would have been his foe alive, he can say in death—

“O, give me thy hand,
One writ with me in sour misfortune's book!
I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave.
. . . .
For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence full of light.”

We may conceive the anguish of the cry that now breaks from him:—

“O my love! my wife!
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.”

“The roses on her lips and cheeks,” which under the first influence of the potion had faded “to paly ashes,” have begun to return, as its effects are dying away. How much is the pathos of the scene deepened by the circumstance that Romeo sees nothing in this to make him hesitate! He thinks only

that "beauty's ensign" is still "crimson in her lips and in her cheeks," and that for a while "death's pale flag is not advanced there." He now sees what she had truly pictured to herself, the body of Tybalt "uncovered on the bier" close beside her. Ever generous and forgiving himself, he turns to ask the forgiveness of his foe:—

"Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?
 O, what more favour can I do to thee,
 Than with that hand which cut thy youth in twain
 To sunder his that was thine enemy?
 Forgive me, cousin!—Ah, dear Juliet,
 Why art thou yet so fair? . . .
Here, here will I remain
 With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
 Will I set up my everlasting rest,
 And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
 From this world-wearied flesh.

 Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!

 Here's to my love!"

Even so before had it been with Juliet—"Romeo, I drink to thee."

While this is going on at the tomb of the Capulets, and on the very instant of Romeo's exclamation, "O true apothecary, thy drugs are quick! Thus with a kiss I die,"—Friar Laurence enters at the far end of the churchyard, with a crowbar and all the materials for opening the monument. As he makes his way towards it he says, groping his way along,—

"Saint Francis be my speed? how oft to-night
 Have my old feet stumbled at graves."

Romeo's man, who has been enjoined, at peril of his life, to keep aloof, tells the Friar of Romeo's advent at the tomb. The Friar's worst fears are aroused by this,—

"Fear comes upon me:
 O, much I fear some ill unlucky thing."

He calls on Romeo's name; finds the sepulchre open, and at the entrance of it, "masterless and gory swords." Entering he sees—

"Romeo! O, pale!—Who else? what, Paris too?
And steep'd in blood?"

Before he has recovered the shock of this discovery Juliet awakes "as from a pleasant sleep." Her first sight is of the Friar. This is as she was promised. Her brain is clear, her memory active.

"O comfortable friar, where is my lord?
I do remember well where I should be.
And there I am.—Where is my Romeo?"

Noises in the distance tell the Friar that the watch is approaching.

"Lady, come from that nest
Of death, contagion, and unnatural sleep:
A greater power than we can contradict
Hath thwarted our intents. Come, come away."

Is it likely she will consent when he adds—

"Thy husband in thy bosom there lies dead.
. . . Come, I'll dispose of thee
Among a sisterhood of holy nuns:
Stay not to question, for the watch is coming."

What a moment for Juliet! She has braved all the horrors which her imagination so vividly pictured for the sake of him who now lies dead before her. She has wakened for this! She has no questions, no words. Her heart is bankrupt utterly. If she can think at all, it is that Romeo has found her dead, and, to follow her quickly, has taken poison. She finds the phial closed tightly in his hand. She utters no reproaches, except the loving one—

"O churl! drink all; and leave no friendly drop,
To help me after!"

The poor old Friar, in his grief and utter bewilderment at this "lamentable chance," finding all his efforts fruitless to tear Juliet from her husband's body, as the noise of the approaching crowd comes nearer, at last leaves her. Juliet, glad of the release, says, "Go, get thee hence, for I will not away." The noise comes nearer still. To be found alive would be to be separated from her lover. The dagger which was to have been

her friendly help to let out life, should the potion not have worked, is not at hand—has not been buried with her. Where can she look for help? Will her desperate hand have indeed to seek some kinsman's bone with which to dash out her brains? No! The "inconstant moon" is a friendly helper now; it breaks through the darkness, and by its light she sees the shimmering of Romeo's dagger. Here is relief! to die by the instrument which had touched his hand, had been part of his daily wearing and belongings—nothing could be more welcome. She snatches it from his belt, exclaiming, as she stabs herself, "O happy dagger! this is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die."

Thus is the "fearful passage of their death-mark'd love" complete. Had Shakespeare only wished to show true love constant and triumphant throughout persistent evil fortune, he might have ended here. But, as I said in the outset, his purpose, I believe, was far wider and deeper, and is plainly shown in the elaborate close which he has written to the scene.

The play opens in the thronged streets of Verona—perhaps in its picturesque and stirring market-place,—where, upon a casual meeting, the hot blood of the retainers of the Montagues and Capulets, made hotter by the blazing noonday sun, breaks out into a bloody brawl, into the midst of which, when at its height, the heads of both the houses rush with a passion little suited to their years, and are reduced to order only by the intervention of their Prince. It closes in the chill midnight, in a churchyard. The actors in the first scene are all present except the kind Lady Montague, who has died of grief that very night for her son's exile; and there, locked in each other's arms in death, lie these two fair young creatures done to death by reason "of their parents' rage."

Too late—too late for their happiness on earth—do these parents learn the lesson of amity and brotherly love over the dumbly eloquent bodies of their immolated children. But they do, with stricken hearts, learn it, and try vainly to make expiation. All future generations may also learn it there, for never could the lesson be more emphatically taught, as of a surety—

“Never was a story of more woe,
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

There is in this play no scope for surmise, no possible misunderstanding of the chief characters or of the poet's purpose, such as there are in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The chill mists and vapours of the North seem to shroud these plays in an atmosphere of mystery, uncertainty, and gloom. But here all is distinct and luminous as the vivid sunshine, or the clear, tender moonlight of the South. You have but to throw your mind back into the history of the time, and to let your heart warm and your imagination kindle with the hot blood and quick-flashing fancies of the Italian temperament, and the whole tale of love and woe stands fully revealed before you. Still, to judge Juliet rightly, we must have clear ideas of Romeo, of her parents, and of all the circumstances that determined her conduct. What I have written, therefore, has been written with this object. Would I might think that in my art I was in some measure able to express what my imagination had conceived of Juliet in her brief hours of exquisite happiness and exquisite suffering!

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

To Mrs S. C. HALL.

[The second of these letters was not completed when tidings of the death, after a very brief illness, of the dear friend for whom it was intended, reached me. She was present to my mind when I wrote it, and I dedicate it to her memory. The world knew her great talents and her worth; but only her friends could estimate her goodness, her charity in thought as well as in deed. Her kindness, like her sympathy, knew no limit. It was as constant and loyal, as it was encouraging and judicious. In loving grateful memory she lives, I doubt not, in many hearts, as she does in mine.]

VI.

IMOGEN, PRINCESS OF BRITAIN

[REDACTED]

[illegible]

VI.

IMOGEN, PRINCESS OF BRITAIN.

“Alas, poor princess,
Thou divine Imogen !”

“So every spirit, as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the fairer body doth procure
To habit in :
For of the soule the bodie forme doth take,
For soule is forme, and doth the bodie make.”

—SPENSER.

MY DEAR ANNA SWANWICK,—

October 1882.

YOU wonder, I daresay, at my long delay in yielding to your urgent request that I should write of Imogen,—your chief favourite, as you tell me, among all Shakespeare's women. You would not wonder, could I make you feel how, by long brooding over her character, and by living through all her emotions and trials on the stage till she seemed to become “my very life of life,” I find it next to impossible to put her so far away from me that I can look at her as a being to be scanned, and measured, and written about. All words—such, at least, as are at my command—seem inadequate to express what I felt about her from my earliest years, not to speak of all that the experiences of my woman's heart and of human life have taught me since of the

matchless truth and beauty with which Shakespeare has invested her. In drawing her he has made his masterpiece; and of all heroines of poetry or romance, who can be named beside her?

It has been my happy lot to impersonate not a few ideal women—among them two of your own Greek favourites, *Antigone* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*:¹ but *Imogen* has always occupied the largest place in my heart; and while she taxed largely my powers of impersonation, she has always repaid me for the effort tenfold by the delight I felt at being the means of placing a being in every way so noble before the eyes and hearts of my audiences, and of making them feel, perhaps, and think of her, and of him to whose genius we owe her, with something of my own reverence and love. Ah, how much finer a medium than all the pen can do for bringing home to the heart what was in Shakespeare's mind when he drew his men and women, is the "well-trod stage," with that living commentary which actor and actress capable in their art can give! How much has he left to be filled up by accent, by play of feature, by bearing, by action, by subtle shades of expression, inspired by the heart and striking home to the heart,—by all those movements and inflections of tone which come intuitively to the sympathetic artist, apparently trifling in themselves, but which play so large a part in producing the impression left upon us by a living interpretation of the master-poet! To one accustomed like myself to such helps as these for bringing out the results of my studies of Shakespeare's women, it seems hopeless to endeavour to convey the same impressions by mere words. The more a character has wound itself round the heart, the more is this felt. Can you wonder, then, that I approach my "woman of women" with fear and trembling?

Do you remember what that bright, charming, frank old lady,

¹ What delight I had in acting these plays in Dublin, and to what intelligent and sympathetic audiences! The *Antigone* gave me the greater pleasure, both for itself, and because of Mendelssohn's music. The chorus was admirable, and all the scenic adjuncts correct and complete. Although the whole performance occupied little more than an hour, great audiences filled the theatre night after night. It is strange how much more deeply these Greek plays moved the Irish heart than either the Scotch or the English. (See Appendix, p. 397.)

—no, I will not call her “old,” for there is nothing old about her; I know many far older in spirit who count not half or a quarter her years,—Mrs D—— S—— said to me lately when you were standing by? She had been scolding me in her playful way for not having given her more of my “letters” to read, and, after calling me idle, forgetful, &c., asked me who was to be the subject of my next. I replied, I thought Imogen, but that I knew I should find it most difficult to express what I felt about her. “Ah, my dear!” she exclaimed, throwing up her hands in her usual characteristic manner when she feels strongly, “you will never write of Imogen as you acted her!” I told her that her words filled me with despair. “Never mind,” was her rejoinder; “go on and try. My memory will fill up the gaps.” I have one of the kind letters by me, which you wrote after seeing me act Imogen at Drury Lane in 1866. So *your* memory too will have to come to my aid, by filling up the gaps. It is very pleasant to think that our friend’s feeling may possibly be shared by many of that unknown public who were always so ready to put themselves in sympathy with me; but that thought does not make the fulfilment of my promise to you the less formidable.

Imogen had been one of the great favourites of my girlhood. At school we used to read the scenes at the cave with Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius; and never can I forget our getting them up to act as a surprise for our governess on her birthday. We always prepared some “surprise” on this occasion, or what she kindly took as one. The brothers were arrayed in all the fur trimmings, boas, cuffs, muffs, &c., we could muster,—one of the muffs doing duty as the cap for Belarius. Then the practisings for something suggestive of the *Æolian* harp that has to play a *Miserere* for Imogen’s supposed death! Our only available means of simulating Belarius’s “ingenious instrument” was a guitar; but the girl who played it had to be apart from the scene, and, as she never would take the right cue, she was always breaking in at the wrong place. I was the Imogen; and, curiously enough, it was as Imogen my dear governess first saw me on the stage. I wondered whether she remembered the incidents of our school-girl performance as I did. She might very well forget, but not I; for what escapes our memory of things done or thought in

childhood? Such small matters then appear eventful, and loom so very large to young eyes and imaginations!

I cannot quite remember who acted with me first in *Cymbeline*, but I can never forget Mr Macready's finding fault with my page's dress, which I had ordered to be made with a tunic that descended to the ankles. On going to the theatre at the last rehearsal, he told me, with many apologies and much concern, that he had seen my page's dress, and had given directions to have it altered. He had taken the liberty of doing this, he said, without consulting me, because, although he could understand the reasons which had weighed with me in ordering the dress to be made as I had done, he was sure I would forgive him when he explained to me that such a dress would not tell the story, and that one-half the audience—all, in fact, who did not know the play—would not discover that it was a disguise, but would suppose Imogen to be still in woman's attire. Remonstrance was too late, and, with many tears, I had to yield, and to add my own terror to that of Imogen when first entering the cave. I managed, however, to devise a kind of compromise, by swathing myself in the "franklin housewife's riding-cloak," which I kept about me as I went into the cave; and this I caused to be wrapped round me afterwards when the brothers carry in Imogen—the poor "dead bird, which they have made so much on."

I remember well the Pisanio was my good friend Mr Elton, the best Pisanio of my time. No one whom I have since acted with has so truly thrown into the part the deep devotion, the respectful manly tenderness and delicacy of feeling, which it requires. He drew out all the nicer points of the character with the same fine and firm hand which we used to admire upon the French stage in M. Regnier, that most finished of artists, in characters of this kind. As I write, by some strange association of ideas—I suppose we must have been rehearsing *Cymbeline* at the time—a little circumstance illustrative of the character of this good Mr Elton comes into my mind. Pardon me if I leave Imogen for the moment, to speak of other matters. This helpful friend did not always cheer and praise, but very kindly told me of my mistakes. We were to appear in *The Lady of Lyons*, which was then in its first run, and had been commanded by the

Queen for a State performance. I had never acted before Her Majesty and Prince Albert; and to me, young as I was, this was a great event. Immediately I thought there ought to be something special about my dress for the occasion. Now, either from a doubt as to the play's success, or for some good financial reason, no expense had been incurred in bringing it out. Mr Macready asked me if I had any dresses which could be adapted for Pauline Deschappelles. He could not, he said, afford to give me new dresses, and he would be glad if I could manage without them. Of course I said I would willingly do my best. Upon consulting with the excellent Mr Dominic Colnaghi, the printseller in Pall Mall, who always gave me access to all his books of costume, I found, as I had already heard, that the dress of the young girl of the period was simple in material and form—fine muslin, with lace *fichus*, ruffles, broad sashes, and the hair worn in long loose curls down the back, my own coming in naturally for this fashion. As it was in my case, so I suppose it was with the others—the costumes, however, being all true to the period. The scenery was of course good and sufficient, for in this department Mr Macready never failed. And thus, with trifling cost, this play, which was to prove so wonderfully successful, came forth to the world unassisted by any extraneous adjuncts, depending solely upon its own merits and the actors' interpretation of it. It must have been written with rare knowledge of what the stage requires, for not one word was cut out, nor one scene rearranged or altered after the first representation. The author was no doubt lucky in his interpreters. Mr Macready, though in appearance far too old for Claude Melnotte, yet had a slight, elastic figure, and so much buoyancy of manner that the impression of age quickly wore off. The secret of his success was, that he lifted the character, and gave it the dignity and strength which it required to make Claude respected under circumstances so equivocal. This was especially conspicuous in a critical point early in the play (Act ii.), where Claude passes himself off as a prince. Mr Macready's manner became his dress. The slight confusion, when addressed by Colonel Damas in Italian, was so instantly turned to his own advantage by the playful way in which he laid the blame on the general's bad Italian, his whole bearing was so dignified and

courteous, that it did not seem strange he should charm the girlish fancy of one who was accustomed to be courted, but whose heart was hitherto untouched. He made the hero, indeed, one of nature's exceptional gentlemen, and in this way preposessed his audience, despite the unworthy device to which Claude lends himself in the first frenzy of wounded vanity. Truth to say, unless dealt with poetically and romantically, both Claude and Pauline drop down into very commonplace people—indeed I have been surprised to see how commonplace. Again, Mrs Clifford as Madame Deschappelles, by a stately aristocratic bearing, carried off the heartless foolishness of her sayings. The Damas of Mr Bartley was a fine vigorous impersonation of the blunt, impetuous, genial soldier. Mr Elton acted, as he always did, most carefully and well, and gave importance and style to the disagreeable character of M. Beauseant.

But to return to the evening of the Royal command, and what I was going to say. I had nothing especially new and fresh to wear; so in honour of the occasion I had ordered from Foster's some lovely pink roses with silver leaves, to trim the dress I worn in the second act. I had hitherto used only real roses—friends, known and unknown, always supplying me with them. One dear friend never failed to furnish Pauline with the bouquet for her hand. Oh, how very often, as she might tell you, has she seen me in that play!¹ I thought my new flowers, when arranged about my dress, looked lovely—quite fairy-like. When accosted with the usual "Good evenings" while waiting at the side scenes for the opening of the second act, I saw Mr Elton looking at me with a sort of amused wonder. I said at once, "Do you not think my fresh flowers pretty?" "Oh," he said, "are they fresh? They must have come a long way. Where do they grow? I never saw any of the kind before. They must have come out of Aladdin's garden. Silver leaves! How remarkable! They may be more rare, but I much prefer the home-

¹ In my mind was always the idea that Pauline loved flowers passionately. It was in the garden, among his flowers, that Claude first saw and loved her. I never was without them in the play; even in the sad last act I had violets on my plain muslin dress. You remember how Madame Deschappelles reproaches Pauline for not being *en grande tenue* on that "joyful occasion."

grown ones you have in your hand." Ridicule of my fine decoration! Alas! alas! I felt at once that it was deserved. It was too late to repair my error. I must act the scene with them—before the Queen, too!—and all my pleasure was gone. I hid them as well as I could with my fan and handkerchief, and hoped no one would notice them. Need I say how they were torn off when I reached my dressing-room, never to see the light again? I never felt more ashamed and vexed with myself.¹

It was well I had a handkerchief on this occasion to help to screen my poor silver leaves; but as a general rule I kept it in my pocket—and for this reason: In the scene in the third act—where Pauline learns the infamous stratagem of which she is the victim—on the night the play was first acted I tore my handkerchief right across without knowing that I had done so; and in the passion and emotion of the scene it became a streamer, and waved about as I moved and walked. Surely any one might have seen that this was an accident, the involuntary act of the maddened girl; but in a criticism on the play—I suppose the day after, but as I was never allowed to have my mind disturbed by theatrical criticisms, I cannot feel sure—I was accused of having arranged this as a trick in order to produce an effect. So innocent was I of a device which would have been utterly at variance with the spirit in which I looked at my art, that when my dear home master and friend asked me if I *had* torn a handkerchief in the scene, I laughed and said, "Yes; at the end of the play my dresser had shown me one in ribbons." "I would not," was his remark, "have you carry one again in the scene, if you can do without it"; and I did not usually do so. It was some time after-

¹ Like many pleasures long looked forward to, the whole of this evening was a disappointment. The side scenes were crowded with visitors, Mr Macready having invited many friends. They were terribly in the way of the exits and entrances. Worse than all, those who knew you insisted on saluting you; those who did not, made you run the gauntlet of a host of curious eyes,—and this in a place where, most properly, no stranger had hitherto been allowed to intrude. Then, too, though of course I never looked at the Queen and the Prince, still their presence was felt by me more than I could have anticipated. It overawed me somehow—stood between me and Pauline; and instead of doing my best, I could not in my usual way lose myself entirely in my character, so that, on the whole, I never acted worse or more artificially—too like my poor flowers!

wards before I learned his reason, and I then continued to keep my handkerchief mostly in my pocket, lest the same accident should happen again ; for, as I always allowed the full feeling of the scene to take possession of me, I could not answer but that it might. There would have been nothing wrong in acting upon what strong natural emotion had suggested in the heat of actual performance ; but all true artists will, I believe, avoid the use of any action, however striking, which may become by repetition a mere mechanical artifice.

It was different with another suggestion which was made to me as to the way I acted in the same scene. As I recalled to Claude, in bitter scorn, his glowing description of his palace by the Lake of Como, I broke into a paroxysm of hysterical laughter, which came upon me, I suppose, as the natural relief from the intensity of the mingled feelings of anger, scorn, wounded pride, and outraged love, by which I found myself carried away. The effect upon the audience was electrical because the impulse was genuine. But well do I remember Mr Macready's remonstrance with me for yielding to it. It was too daring, he said ; to have failed in it on a first representation might have ruined the scene (which was true). No one, moreover, should ever, he said, hazard an unrehearsed effect. I could only answer that I could not help it ; that this seemed the only way for my feelings to find vent ; and if the impulse seized me again, again, I feared, I must act the scene in the same way. And often as I have played Pauline, never did the situation fail to bring back the same burst of hysterical emotion ; nor, so far as I know, did any one ever regard my yielding to it as out of place, or otherwise than true to nature. Some time afterwards I was comforted by reading a reply of the great French actor Baron, when he was blamed for raising his hands above his head in some impassioned scene, on the ground that such a gesture was contrary to the rules of art. "Tell me not of art," he said. "If nature makes you raise your hands, be it ever so high, be sure nature is right, and the business of art is to obey her." When playing with Mr Macready the following year at the Haymarket, I noticed a chair placed every evening at the wing as I went on the stage for this act. On inquiry, I found it was for Mrs Glover, the

great actress of comedy, who afterwards told me that she came every night to see me in this scene, she was so much struck by the originality of my treatment of it. She said it was bold beyond anything she had ever known; and yet it was always so fresh and new, that each time it moved her as if she had not seen it before. Nature spoke through me to her—no praise to me.

The success of *The Lady of Lyons* had during the rehearsals been considered very doubtful. Its defects in a literary point of view seemed obvious to those who were capable of judging, and its merits as a piece of skilful dramatic construction could not then be fully seen. The master and dear friend of whom I spoke in my letter on Juliet, thought the character of Pauline, when I was studying it, very difficult and somewhat disagreeable. I remember well his saying to me, "You have hitherto, in your Shakespearian studies, had to lift yourself up to the level of your heroines; now you must, by tone and manner and dignity of expression, lift this one up to yourself." During the rehearsals no one knew who was the author. The play had not a name given to it until very near the time it was brought out. There was great speculation during the rehearsals as to who was the author, and what it was to be called. *Love and Duty*, *Love and Pride*, were suggested, but discarded as too like the titles of a novel. *The Gardener's Son*, said one. No, that suggested nothing. *The Merchant of Lyons*, said another. No, surely not; was there not a *Merchant of Venice*? Upon which Mr Bartley, who was the stage manager, and also the first and the best Colonel Damas, turned to me, and taking off his hat, and bowing in the soldier-like manner of the colonel in the play, said, "I think 'my young cousin' should give the play a name. Shall it not be called *The Lady of Lyons*?" Whether this name had been decided on before, I cannot tell; but shortly after the play was announced by that title.¹

During the first run of this play—it was in winter—I suffered terribly from a constant cough. It would sometimes seize me in the most trying passages. On one of these occasions I found Lord Lytton waiting for me as I left the scene, showing the

¹ See Appendix, p. 399.

greatest concern, and begging me to take care of my health. Shortly after, he sent some lozenges to my dressing-room, with renewed injunctions to give up acting for a time. As this involved the withdrawal of the play at the height of its success, I felt how generous was this proposal. Indeed I always found Lord Lytton most kind and considerate, with a very tender heart for suffering. Not long afterwards, my physicians sent me away from my loved work for many weary months: but rest had become quite necessary; had they not insisted upon it, no more work or play would there have been for me in this world.

But, oh how I have wandered from Imogen! It is I suppose, like Portia,—

“To peize the time,
To eke it and to draw it out in length,”—

to stay myself from grappling with a task which I yearn, yet dread, to approach.

It is impossible, I find, to write of Imogen, without treating in some degree of all the principal characters of the play. She acts upon and influences them all. We must make ourselves familiar with them, in order fully to know her. This opens up a wide field; for the action of the play covers an unusual space, and is carried on by many important agents. It sets the unities, especially the unity of place, entirely at defiance. We are now in Britain, then in Rome—anon once more in Britain, then back in Rome. The scene changes, and we are again at Cymbeline's Court; then in a mountainous region of South Wales; and so backwards and forwards to the end of the play. *Cymbeline* would be the despair of those getters-up of plays nowadays, whose scenery is so elaborate that they can give but one scene to each act. But, oh how refreshing it is to have your thoughts centred upon such human beings as Shakespeare drew, each phase of their characters unfolding before you, with all their joys, their woes, their affections, sufferings, passions, instead of the immovable upholstery and painted simulations of reality in which the modern fashion takes delight! The eye perhaps is pleased, but what becomes of the heart and the imagination? Some people tell you that Shakespeare would, if he could, have availed himself of all the material resources of the costumier,

scene-painter, and stage-manager, which are now so freely used. I venture to think not. He knew too well that if the eye be distracted by excess either of numbers or of movement, or by a multiplicity of beautiful or picturesque objects, the actor must work at a disadvantage. He can neither gain nor keep that grasp of the minds and sympathies of the audience which is essential for bringing home to them the purpose of the poet.

I have seen the plot of *Cymbeline* severely censured. The play certainly wants the concentration which is supposed to be necessary for representation on the stage. It is not marked by the exquisite constructive skill which is apparent in *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and some of Shakespeare's other plays. Still the plot itself is clear enough, and sufficiently full of sustained interest to engage the attention of the audience and keep it in suspense to the close. The play, in fact, is of only too luxuriant growth, so that a little judicious lopping improves its form without prejudice to it as an acting drama. Its occasional diffuseness is plainly caused by an extreme anxiety to leave nothing obscure either in the action or the characters. But the genius of the great dramatist is apparent in the skill with which the story of Imogen's trials is interwoven with traditionary tales of the ancient Britons and their relations to Rome, which give to the play the vivid interest of a grand historical background. The incident on which it hinges—the wager between Iachimo and Posthumus—appears to have been taken from Boccaccio's story, simply because it was familiar to the theatre-going public, and because Shakespeare saw in it a great opportunity for introducing characters and incidents well fitted to develop, in a manner "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," the character of a noble, cultivated, loving woman and wife at her best. The play might indeed be fitly called *Imogen*, *Princess of Britain*, for it is upon her, her trials and her triumph, that it chiefly turns.

Observe how carefully Shakespeare fixes our attention upon her at the very outset of the play, by the conversation of the two courtiers. "You do not meet a man but frowns," says one; for the king is angry, and from him all the Court takes its tone. To the question, "But what's the matter?" he replies—

"His daughter, and the heir of his kingdom, whom
He purposed to his wife's sole son (a widow
That late he married), hath referr'd herself
Unto a poor but worthy gentleman. She's wedded;
Her husband banish'd; she imprison'd: all
Is outward sorrow; though I think the king
Be touched at very heart.

2nd Gent.

None but the king?

1st Gent. He that hath lost her, too: so is the queen,
That most desired the match: but not a courtier,
Although they wear their faces to the bent
Of the king's looks, but hath a heart that is not
Glad at the thing they scowl at.

2nd Gent.

And why so?

1st Gent. He that hath miss'd the princess is a thing
Too bad for bad report; and he that hath her—
I mean, that married her,—alack, good man!
And therefore banish'd—is a creature such
As, to seek through the regions of the earth
For one his like, there would be something failing
In him that should compare. I do not think
So fair an outward, and such stuff within,
Endows a man but he."

The speaker has much more to say in praise of Posthumus Leonatus; but the climax of his panegyric is, that the best proof of the worth of Posthumus lies in the fact that such a woman as Imogen has chosen him for her husband:—

"His mistress,—

For whom he now is banish'd,—her own price
Proclaims how she esteem'd him and his virtue;
By her election may be truly read
What kind of man he is."

Thus, then, we see that Imogen is fitly mated. There has been that "marriage of true minds" on which Shakespeare lays so much stress in one of his finest sonnets (the 116th). Both are noble creatures, rich in the endowments of body as well as mind, and drawn towards each other as

"Like to like, but like in difference,
Distinct in individualities,
But like each other even as those who love."

What Shakespeare intends us to see in Imogen is made

plain by the impression she is described as producing on all who come into contact with her,—strangers, as well as those who have seen her grow up at her father's Court. She is of royal nature as well as of royal blood,—too noble to know that she is noble. A grand and patient faithfulness is at the root of her character. Yet she can be angry, vehement, passionate, upon occasion. With a being of so fine and sensitive an organisation, how could it be otherwise? Her soul's strength and nobleness, speaking through her form and movements, impress all alike with an irresistible charm. Her fine taste, her delicate ways, her accomplishments, her sweet singing, are brought before us by countless subtle touches. To her belongs especially the quality of grace,—that quality which, in Goethe's words, "macht unwiderstehlich,"¹ and which, as Racine says, is even "superior to beauty, or rather is beauty sweetly animated." Iachimo, fastidious and cloyed in sensuality as he is, no sooner sees her than he is struck with admiring awe:—

"All of her that is out of door most rich !
If she be furnish'd with a mind so rare,
She is alone the Arabian bird."

And even Cloten, whose dull brain cannot resist the impression of her queenly grace and beauty, grows eloquent when he speaks of her:—

"She's fair and royal,
And hath all courtly parts more exquisite
Than lady, ladies, woman ; from every one
The best she hath, and she, of all compounded,
Outsells them all."

Like many of Shakespeare's heroines, Imogen has early lost her mother ; but she has been most lovingly and royally nurtured by her father, to whom, no doubt, she was doubly endeared after the loss of his two sons. What she was to him, we see

¹ "Die Schönheit bleibt sich selber selig,
Die Anmuth macht unwiderstehlich."

Self-blest is beauty, look who list ;
Grace has a charm none may resist.

—*Faust*, Part II.

when his hour of trouble comes, and he is left without her. "Imogen, the great part of my comfort, gone!" (Act iv. sc. 3.) Her fine intellect and strong affection would then have been the stay to him it had often been in the days before he allowed his love for her to be overclouded by the fascinations of his beautiful and crafty second queen. Yet not even she could keep him from being "touched at very heart," despite his anger at his child for wedding Posthumus.

With what skill the characters of that queen and of Cymbeline are put before us! He is full of good impulses, but weak, wayward, passionate, and, as such natures commonly are when thwarted, cruel, and carried away, like Lear, by "impatient womanish violence." Having no insight into character, he has been led by designing flatterers, who played upon his weakness, to suspect "the perfect honour" of his tried friend and officer Belarius, and to banish him from the Court. The loss of his two sons, stolen from him by Belarius in revenge for this wrong, has embittered his life. It probably cost him also that of their mother, whose death left the Princess Imogen, her youngest-born, as his only solace. Out of the nobler impulse of his nature came the care and training which he gave to Posthumus, the orphaned son of his great general, Sicilius Leonatus. And yet—after treating him as if he were one of the sons whom he had lost, breeding him along with Imogen as her "playfellow," and knowing, as he could not fail to know, the deep affection that must spring from such an intimacy—on discovering the marriage, he sends him from the Court with violence and in disgrace, careless of the misery which, by so doing, he inflicts on his own child. Left to himself, things might have taken a very different course. But he is blinded for the time by the spell which his newly wedded, beautiful, soft-voiced, dissembling queen has cast upon him. At her instigation he resents the marriage with a bitterness the more intense because it is in some measure artificial, and gives vent to his anger against Posthumus in an undignified manner, and in unkingly phrases:—

"Thou basest thing, avoid! Hence from my sight!

. Away!

Thou'rt poison to my blood!"

In the same passionate way he heaps maledictions on his daughter. "O thou vile one!"

"Nay, let her languish
A drop of blood a day, and, being aged,
Die of this folly!"

Choleric and irrational as old Capulet himself, Cymbeline is equally regardless of everybody's feelings but his own. Just the man, therefore, to become the plastic tool of a cold, beautiful, unscrupulous, ambitious woman like his queen. She, again, has but one soft place in her heart, and that is filled by her handsome peacock-witted son Cloten—a lout so vapid and brainless that he cannot "take two from twenty and leave eighteen." For him this fawning, dissembling, crafty woman—this secret poisoner, in intention, if not in deed—is prepared to dare everything. If she cannot secure Imogen for her son, and so prepare his way to the throne, she is quite ready to "catch the nearest way" by compassing Imogen's death. Cymbeline, infatuated by an old man's love for a handsome woman, is a child in her hands. Imogen's keen intelligence sees through her pretended sympathy, dismissing it with the words—

"Oh dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant
Can tickle where she wounds!"—

knowing well that she will have less cause to dread "the hourly shot of angry eyes" than the silent machinations of this "most delicate fiend."

The whole tragedy of her position is summed up by Imogen herself early in the play, in the words (Act i. sc. 6)—

"A father cruel and a step-dame false :
A foolish suitor to a wedded lady,
That hath her husband banish'd :—oh, that husband !
My supreme crown of grief ! and those repeated
Vexations of it !"

Note, too, how it looks to the shrewd Second Lord in attendance upon Cloten (Act ii. sc. 1) :—

"Alas, poor princess,
Thou divine Imogen, what thou endur'st !

Betwixt a father by thy step-dame govern'd ;
 A mother hourly coining plots, a wooer
 More hateful than the foul expulsion is
 Of thy dear husband, than that horrid act
 Of the divorce he'd make ! The heavens hold firm
 The walls of thy dear honour, keep unshaked
 That temple, thy fair mind !”

And all this, while she was still “comforted to live,” because in her husband she had the one priceless “jewel in the world that she might see again.” Rudely stripped of that comfort, as she soon is, what state so desolate, what trial more cruel than hers ! But I must not anticipate.

When we see Imogen first, it is at the moment of her parting with Posthumus. Their marriage-hours must have been of the shortest. Even had they tried to conceal their union, which most probably they had not, the watchful queen, with her spies everywhere, would speedily have discovered it. It is she indeed who has unwittingly brought about that union ; for her encouragement of the suit of her son—“that harsh, shallow nothing”—has made a marriage with Posthumus the only effectual barrier to it, and enabled him to prevail on Imogen to “set up her disobedience 'gainst the king her father.” One wrong leads to another. The marriage, when made known, is followed by the instant and contemptuous banishment of Posthumus ; and it is in the sharp anguish of his separation from Imogen that we first see them—anguish made more poignant by the pretended sympathy of the queen, to whom they owe their misery. Posthumus entreats his wife—

“O lady, weep no more, lest I give cause
 To be suspected of more tenderness
 Than doth become a man ! I will remain
 The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth.”

They exchange those parting gifts, one of which is to work so fatally against their happiness ; she giving him what, we may be assured, was her most treasured possession, the diamond that had been her mother's—with the words,—oh, how full of tenderness !—

“Take it, heart ;
 But keep it till you woo another wife,
 When Imogen is dead !”—

while he clasps a bracelet on her arm, saying—

“For my sake, wear this ;
It is a manacle of love : I’ll place it
Upon this fairest prisoner.

Imo. O the gods !
When shall we see again ?”

All further speech between them is stopped by the entrance of Cymbeline, who thrusts Posthumus from the Court with words so coarsely insulting that, as he goes, Imogen exclaims—

“There cannot be a pinch in death
More sharp than this is.”

And now when her father turns his reproaches upon her, we see in her replies the loving, dutiful daughter, the still more loving and devoted wife :—

“I beseech you, sir,
Harm not yourself with your vexation ; I
Am senseless of your wrath ; a touch more rare
Subdues all pangs, all fears.

Cym. Thou mightst have had the sole son of my queen !

Imo. O blest, that I might not ! . . .

Cym. Thou took’st a beggar ; wouldst have made my throne
A seat for baseness !

Imo. No ; I rather added
A lustre to it.

Cym. O thou vile one !

Imo. Sir,
It is your fault that I have loved Posthumus :
You bred him as my playfellow ; and he is
A man worth any woman, overbuys me
Almost the sum he pays.

Cym. What, art thou mad ?

Imo. Almost, sir : heaven restore me ! Would I were
A neat-herd’s daughter, and my Leonatus
Our neighbour shepherd’s son !”

A cry, we may well believe, that has often risen in palaces from hearts weary of the irksome restraints, or awed by the great responsibilities, of princely life.

Her father leaves her, with the order to his queen, “Away with her, and pen her up !” and Pisanio returns with the tidings

that Cloten had drawn his sword upon his master Posthumus. Imogen's contempt for Cloten breaks out despite his mother's presence :—

“Your son's my father's friend ; he takes his part.
To draw upon an exile ! O brave sir !
I would they were in Afric both together ;
Myself by with a needle, that I might prick
The goer-back.”

Posthumus, assured that in Pisanio Imogen would have at least one loyal friend who might be counted on to stand firmly by her, has sent him back, refusing to allow him to be absent from her even for so brief a time as was necessary to reach the haven. But now Imogen desires him to return to “see her lord aboard.” Why she did so, we learn in their dialogue when he returns :—

Imo. What was the last
That he spake to thee ?
Pis. It was, ‘His queen ! his queen !’
Imo. Then waved his handkerchief ?
Pis. And kiss'd it, madam.
Imo. Senseless linen ! Happier therein than I !
And that was all ?
Pis. No, madam ; for so long
As he could make me with this eye or ear
Distinguish him from others, he did keep
The deck, with glove or hat or handkerchief
Still waving, as the fits and stirs of his mind
Could best express how slow his soul sail'd on,
How swift his ship.
Imo. Thou shouldst have made him
As little as a crow, or less, ere left
To after-eye him.
Pis. Madam, so I did.
Imo. I would have broke mine eye-strings, crack'd them, but
To look upon him ; till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle ;
Nay, follow'd him, till he had melted from
The smallness of a gnat to air ; and then
Have turn'd mine eye and wept. But, good Pisanio,
When shall we hear from him ?
Pis. Be assured madam,
With his next vantage.
Imo. I did not take my leave of him, but had
Most pretty things to say : ere I could tell him

How I would think on him, at certain hours,
Such thoughts and such ; or I could make him swear
The shes of Italy should not betray
Mine interest and his honour ; or have charged him
At the sixth hour of morn, at noon, at midnight,
To encounter me with orisons, for then
I am in heaven for him ; or ere I could
Give him that parting kiss which I had set
Betwixt two charming words, comes in my father,
And, like the tyrannous breathing of the north,
Shakes all our buds from growing."

Imogen can pour out her heart in these exquisite bursts of tenderness before Pisanio without reserve, because she is assured of his sympathy, and of his devotion to her lord as well as to herself. I have always fancied that Pisanio had formerly been a follower of Posthumus's father, Sicilius Leonatus, and had been assigned, therefore, by Cymbeline to his son as his special servant when he first took the orphaned boy under his care, and made him the playfellow of Imogen. He had seen Posthumus grow up with all the winning graces of a fine person, and a simple, truthful, manly nature, so void of guile himself as to be unsuspecting of it in others ; while Imogen had developed into the beautiful, accomplished, high-souled woman, for whom mere "princely suitors"—and, we are told, she had many—had no attraction, companioned as she had been from childhood to womanhood by one whose high and winning qualities she knew so well. Pisanio had seen them grow dearer and dearer to each other, and never doubted that Cymbeline looked with favour on their growing affection until the evil hour when he re-married, and was persuaded by his queen to favour Cloten's suit. The character of that coarse, arrogant, cowardly braggadocio must have made his pretensions to the hand of Imogen odious to the whole Court that loved and honoured her, but especially to Pisanio ; and we may be sure he was taken into counsel, when a marriage was resolved upon as the only way to make the union with Cloten impossible. Thus he has drawn upon himself the suspicion and hatred of the queen and her handsome, well-proportioned, brainless son. I say well-proportioned ; for how otherwise could Imogen have afterwards mistaken his headless body, as she does (Act iv. sc. 2), for that of Posthumus ?

These opening scenes, in which Imogen appears, are a proof, among many others, how much Shakespeare expected from the personators of his heroines. In them the actress must contrive to produce the impression of a character of which all that is afterwards seen of Imogen is the natural development. In look, in bearing, in tone and accent, we must see the princess, strong in the possession of fine and cultivated intelligence, and equal, through all her womanly tenderness and by very reason of that tenderness, to any strain which may be put upon her fortitude and endurance,—one who, while she draws on all insensibly to love her by her mere presence, at the same time inspires them with a reverent devotion. Ah ! how little can those who, in mere ignorance, speak slightly of the actor's art, know of the mental and moral training which is needed to take home into the being, and then to express in action, however faintly, what must have been in the poet's mind, as his vision of Imogen found expression in the language he has put into her mouth !

And now we must leave Imogen, and follow Posthumus to Rome, where he is expected at a banquet at his friend Philario's house. Before he enters (Act i. sc. 5) we see that, except by his host, his presence is not desired. His reputation as no ordinary man has run before him ; and the French and Roman guests already carp at and depreciate him. When he enters, his self-possession and dignified courtesy show in marked contrast to the disposition seen in the others to irritate and offend him. Iachimo has an old grudge against him. He had seen him before in Britain, and the antagonism between his own corrupt and selfish nature and the noble qualities of Posthumus had bred mutual dislike. The Italian's flippancy and loose vein of expression are rebuked by the calm reticence of the Briton. This reserve is made greater by the deep sorrow that is tugging at his heart. By what now seems to him his selfishness in pressing Imogen to a private marriage, he has brought not only disgrace and contumely upon himself, but suffering and sorrow upon her whom his love would yearn to shelter from any touch of pain. Remorse, love, and pride are thus at war within him. Angry with himself, he is impatient of annoyance or opposition.

In this mood, on reaching his friend's house, he encounters in Iachimo a man who would have been distasteful to him under any circumstances. Nothing could be more unlucky. In his present state of mind he is fit company for no stranger, least of all for this mocking supercilious Italian, with his ostentatious disbelief in woman's worth,—his arrogant, sarcastic nature, indolent yet cunning, and only moved to action by the desire to gratify his vanity or his senses. Iachimo's very manner, with its assured complacency, irritates and frets the heart-stricken Briton. Had he not been at war with himself, I believe he would not have allowed a conversation to be carried on in his presence, in which his mistress's name should even be mentioned. But, smarting as he is under Cymbeline's insulting language, with the echo of it still ringing in his ears, he is unable to retain his usual reticence and self-command. He is moved in time to give taunt for taunt, boast for boast; and when this insolent unmannerly stranger dares to bring the constancy and honour of his mistress into question, he is provoked into accepting the challenge which Iachimo proposes as a test of her virtue, without thinking for the moment of the insult to his wife implied by the mere introduction of such a man into her presence.

We now go back to Imogen. Weeks have obviously gone by; but we hear that "she weeps still." The persecution of a "father cruel, and a step-dame false," and the importunities of "a foolish suitor," serve but to make her cling closer to the thought of her dear lord and husband.

"Oh, that husband!
My supreme crown of grief! . . .
Had I been thief-stolen,
As my two brothers, happy! but most miserable
Is the desire that's glorious."

She is in this mood when Pisanio introduces "a noble gentleman of Rome," who brings letters from her lord. The mere mention of them sends all the colour from her face. Iachimo noticing this, reassures her:—

"Change you, madam?
The worthy Leonatus is in safety,
And greets your highness dearly."

Now returns the delicate rose to her cheek, the warmth to her heart, and she can say with all her accustomed grace, "Thanks, good sir. You are kindly welcome." This is her first letter from her wedded lord; and while she is drinking in its words of love, Iachimo is watching her with all his eyes. The happiness in hers, lately so full of tears, adds to her fascination, and her whole demeanour expresses, silently but eloquently, the purity and beauty of her soul. Iachimo, unbeliever as he is in woman's worth, is too shrewd not to see that the charm of her face and person—"all of her that is out of door most rich!"—would not be so exquisite but for the dignity and elevation of her mind. His wager, he feels instinctively, is as good as lost; but the stake is too serious not to be played for, at all risks.

"Boldness, audacity," must arm him "from head to foot," aided by all the craft and subtlety of a spirit long versed in guile. No matter at what sacrifice of truth, or at what cost of misery to his victims, the wager must be won. He already feels it will not be gained by triumph over Imogen's virtue; but means must be found to wreak his hate upon the haughty, self-reliant Briton, and to bring down his pride, by convincing him of her disloyalty.

He begins his advances in the way common to common minds, by daring to praise and seeming to be lost in admiration of Imogen's beauty. But here he is entirely thwarted, for she fails to see his meaning, and asks, in all simplicity, "What, dear sir, thus wraps you? Are you well?" Having the sense at once to see that he is upon a wrong tack, he starts upon another, in hopes of better success. In reply to her anxious inquiry after the health of her lord, he assures her that he is not only well, but

"Exceeding pleasant; none a stranger there
So merry and so gamesome: he is call'd
The Briton reveller."

A report so little in consonance with all she has known of Posthumus at once arrests Imogen's attention. Iachimo, thinking he has gained a point and that he may pique her pride, proceeds to illustrate the small respect in which her husband holds her sex, by telling her of a "Frenchman, his companion," over whose sighs for "a Gallian girl at home" Posthumus makes merry:—

a wrong like this there is no remedy, no revenge. It is too monstrous even for belief :—

“ Revenged !

How should I be revenged ? If this be true—
As I have such a heart, that both mine ears
Must not in haste abuse—if it be true,
How shall I be revenged ? ”

Imogen, who has throughout felt an instinctive dislike to the free-spoken Roman,—this bringer of ill tidings,—when he now dares to tender love and devotion to herself, on the instant reads him through and through. She calls at once for Pisanio to eject him from her presence, but the wily Italian has taken care not to have her loyal retainer within hearing. Quite early in the scene he has sent him out of the way by the words—

“ Beseech you, sir, desire
My man's abode where I did leave him : he
Is strange and peevish. ”

Pisanio does not, therefore, answer to his mistress's call, and Iachimo continues his advances. Her instinct, then, was right. The cloud vanishes which for a moment has rested upon her mind ; and instead of the doubting perplexed woman, wounded in her most sacred belief, we see the indignant princess sweeping from her presence in measureless scorn the man whose every word she feels to be an insult :—

“ Away ! I do condemn mine ears that have
So long attended thee. If thou wert honourable,
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not
For such an end thou seek'st ; as base as strange.
Thou wrong'st a gentleman, who is as far
From thy report as thou from honour ; and
Solicit'st here a lady, that disdains
Thee and the devil alike.—What ho ! Pisanio ! ”

At this point the address of the wily, subtle Italian comes to his rescue. The vulnerable point in Imogen, he sees, is her devotion to her lord, and Iachimo immediately breaks out into his praises, and excuses all which he has before said by the plea that his object was to prove if Imogen was indeed worthy of “ the worthiest sir that ever country called his ” :—

“Give me your pardon.
 I have spoke this, to know if your affiance
 Were deeply rooted ; and shall make your lord
 That which he is new o’er. And he is one,
 The truest manner’d ; such a holy witch,
 That he enchants societies unto him :
 Half all men’s hearts are his.”

Forgetting her own wrong in the delight of hearing this tribute paid to the worth of that dear lord whose name has of late been only coupled in her hearing with insulting and contumelious epithets, Imogen murmurs half aloud, “You make amends.” Iachimo, seeing his advantage, pursues it :—

“He sits ’mongst men like a descended god :
 He hath a kind of honour sets him off,
 More than a mortal seeming. . . .
 The love I bear him
 Made me to fan you thus ; but the gods made you,
 Unlike all others, chaffless. Pray, your pardon !”

This praise of Posthumus, now so rare at Cymbeline’s Court, together with Iachimo’s vehement protestations of regard for him, completely deceives Imogen, and she replies, “All’s well, sir. Take my power in the Court for yours.” His “humble thanks” are tendered, and his audience ended. As he retires, however, he turns back, and in the most seemingly simple manner asks for the aid she has proffered, to help him in the safe keeping of the costly plate and jewels which he had purchased in France, as a present to the Emperor from “some dozen Romans of us and your lord, the best feather of our wing.” It is enough for her that Posthumus has an interest in their “safe stowage” :—

“Since
 My lord hath interest in them, I will keep them
 In my bed-chamber.”

How Iachimo’s heart must have bounded at these words ! Things fashion themselves for him to a wish, and make easy the way, which before had seemed beset with insurmountable difficulties. The generous forgiveness of the princess, and her pleasure in showing courtesy to him who had professed so much regard for

her lord, thus become the ministers to his vile purpose and her own wretchedness.

We next see Imogen in her bed, reading. How rich were the appointments of her chamber, we gather afterwards from Iachimo's description (Act ii. sc. 4). It was hung

“With tapestry of silk and silver ; the story,
Proud Cleopatra when she met her Roman. . . .
. A piece of work
So bravely done, so rich, that it did strive
In workmanship and value. . . .
. The chimney-piece
Chaste Dian bathing : never saw I figures
So likely to report themselves. . . .
The roof o' the chamber
With golden cherubims is fretted.”

And from such luxury, such surroundings, which have been with her all her life, the treachery of this ignoble, crafty, selfish villain, lying on the watch there in his trunk, was shortly to cast her forth into an unknown world, in misery, in pain and weariness of body, with only the ground for her bed !

Imogen has been reading for three hours—a weary time for the hidden “Italian fiend” ! On hearing it is midnight, she dismisses her woman Helen, telling her to “fold down the leaf where she had left.” This, we hear from Iachimo afterwards, was the tale of Tereus, “where Philomel gave up,”—that is, we may suppose, at the point where Philomela and her sister Procne were (in answer to their prayer to escape Tereus, their infuriated pursuer) transformed, the one into a nightingale, the other into a swallow. She adds—

“Take not away the taper, leave it burning ;
And if thou canst awake by four o' the clock,
I prithee, call me. Sleep hath seized me wholly.”

She kisses fondly the bracelet on her arm, the parting gift of Leonatus, and with a brief prayer to the gods for protection “from fairies and the tempters of the night,” drops into that deep sleep which enables Iachimo to accomplish his purpose unheard, unseen. Libertine and sceptic as he is, he is awed by the exquisite beauty and chastity of the sleeper :—

“ Cytherea,
 How bravely thou becom'st thy bed ! Fresh lily !
 And whiter than the sheets ! That I might touch !
 But kiss ; one kiss ! Rubies unparagon'd,
 How dearly they do't ! 'Tis her breathing that
 Perfumes the chamber thus. The flame o' the taper
 Bows towards her, and would under-peep her lids,
 To see the enclosed lights, now canopied
 Under these windows, white and azure, laced
 With blue of heaven's own tinct.”

What a picture is here ! Drawn by a master-hand ; for Iachimo has all the subtle perception of the refined sensualist. “ That I might touch ! ” But even he, struck into reverence, dares not. “ A thousand liveried angels wait on her,” so that his approach is barred. With all despatch he notes the features and furniture of the room. “ Sleep, the ape of death, lies dull upon her,” and this emboldens him to steal the bracelet from her arm. While he is triumphing in the thought how this may be used to work “ the madding of her lord,” his eye is caught by a mark he has espied upon her bosom, which “ rivets, screws itself to his memory,” as a conclusive voucher with Posthumus that he has “ ta'en the treasure of her honour ” :—

“ On her left breast
 A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
 I' the bottom of a cowslip.”

What need of further token ! Those of which he is now possessed, he is satisfied, will be ample to carry conviction to a man of pure heart like Posthumus, who could not conceive of baseness so vile as that by which Iachimo has come to know of that sweet secret mark. Now, therefore, he may return to the chest, and shut the lid, invoking, as he does so, “ the dragons of the night,” to fly swiftly, that “ dawning may bare the raven's eye.” His men doubtless have their orders to carry away the supposed treasure-chest by daybreak. Well may he dread the time till then :—

“ I lodge in fear ;
 Though this a heavenly angel, hell is here.”

And this same hell he is to carry about with him, as we shall see,

for ever after; a hell of remorse which robs him of his valour and his peace.

In the morning we find musicians, hired by Cloten, singing under Imogen's chamber-window that brightest, daintiest of *aubades*, "Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings!" as if Shakespeare could not choose but pour out his own heart in homage to the "divine Imogen" he had created. Forced to appear in answer to Cloten's importunities, she tells him frankly, "You lay out too much pains for purchasing but trouble." The silly underbred fellow will not take her denial, and by his rudeness forces her for a moment to meet him with his own weapons. But it is only for a moment; and then she offers him this pretty and most characteristic apology, even while she makes clearer than ever the hopelessness of his suit:—

"I am much sorry, sir,
You put me to forget a lady's manners,
By being so verbal: and learn now, for all,
That I, which know my heart, do here pronounce,
By the very truth of it, I care not for you;
And am so near the lack of charity,
(To accuse myself) I hate you; which I had rather
You felt, than mak't my boast."

Exasperated by this avowal, Cloten replies by attacking "that base wretch" Posthumus:—

"One bred of alms, and foster'd with cold dishes,
With scraps o' the Court;"—

and asserts that her contract with him is no contract at all, and that she, being curbed in her actions by "the consequence o' the crown," must not soil

"The precious note of it with a base slave,
A hilding for a livery, a squire's cloth,
A pantler, not so eminent."

On this Imogen's patience leaves her, and she turns upon him with the same eloquence of scorn with which we have before seen her silence Iachimo, but with even greater contempt:—

"Profane fellow!
Wert thou the son of Jupiter, and no more

But what thou art besides, thou wert too base
To be his groom. . . .

Clo. The south-fog rot him !

Imo. He never can meet more mischance, than come
To be but named of thee ! His meanest garment,
That ever hath but clipp'd his body, is dearer
In my respect than all the hairs above thee,
Were they all made such men."

Even as she speaks, she misses from her arm the bracelet which had never quitted it since Posthumus placed it there, and hastily summons Pisanio, whom she bids tell her women to search for it. Vexation upon vexation :—

"I am spirited with a fool,
Frighted, and anger'd worse."

As is so common when we first miss anything, she thinks she saw it lately :—

"I do think
I saw't this morning : confident I am
Last night 'twas on mine arm ; I kissed it,"—

adding, with a sweet womanish touch—

"I hope it be not gone to tell my lord
That I kiss aught but he."

"*Aught*," you see, not "*any one*." Alas ! it *has* gone to him, and on a deadlier errand. "Frighted" as Imogen now is, she is in no humour to be longer "spirited by a fool." Cloten's threat of appealing to her father is treated with contempt, and she leaves him "to the worst of discontent," and to fierce threats of vengeance, in the midst of which her preference for her husband's "meanest garment" is always uppermost in his foolish brain.

In the next scene we are again in Philario's house in Rome, to which Iachimo has returned with all possible speed. I need not dwell upon the skill with which Iachimo develops his proofs against the virtue of Imogen, bringing them forward one by one, as if they were drawn from him reluctantly, and mingled with such suggestions as, in the mouth of a known voluptuary like himself, could not fail to lend confirmation to his story. Posthumus is no easy dupe. His faith in Imogen is too deeply

rooted. He fights against conviction to the last, and only yields when Iachimo crowns his story by speaking of the mole under Imogen's breast, "right proud of that most delicate lodging." Nor is he alone in his conviction; for his friend Philario, who knows Iachimo well enough to be sure that he would be in no way scrupulous about truth in a matter of this kind, is himself compelled to come to the same conclusion, and to avow it by saying to Iachimo, "You have won." It is impossible, indeed, not to admire the exquisite art with which this super-subtle Italian arrays what he afterwards (Act v. sc. 5) calls "simular proof enough to make the noble Leonatus mad," and, in doing so, fulfils the dramatist's purpose of keeping alive our respect for the wretched husband, whose whole life is laid waste by the ruin of his belief in one who had been the incarnation for him of all that was beautiful, and pure, and holy upon earth. Were it otherwise, we could not forgive the cruel device by which he, who had been her "true knight," all "of her honour confident," sought to avenge his imagined wrong, by commanding Pisanio to lure her from the Court, on the pretext of bringing her to her husband, and then to take away her life.

What a contrast to the scene in which Posthumus gives vent to his anguish and despair (Act ii. sc. 5) is that in which we next see Imogen (Act iii. sc. 2)! It is the one occasion in the whole play in which she can smile and is happy. That her natural temperament is cheerful, we see by the readiness with which she seizes this first opportunity to rejoice—a letter from her lord, and when least expected:—

Pis. Madam, here is a letter from my lord.

Imo. Who? thy lord? that is my lord, Leonatus!"

How Pisanio must have shuddered inwardly as he gave it to her, knowing for what it was devised, and seeing the ecstasy with which it is welcomed! How pretty is the way in which she, as it were, talks to the letter before she opens it:—

"Oh, learn'd indeed were that astronomer
That knew the stars as I his characters;
He'd lay the future open."

Then the little prayer, like some devout Greek, to the "good gods" to

"Let what is here contain'd relish of love,
Of my lord's health, of his content—yet not,
That we two are asunder,—let that grieve him."

In her overflowing happiness, as she breaks the wax of the seals, she blesses the very bees "that make these locks of counsel." And then her transport when she finds from the letter that Posthumus is again in Britain, and that he invites her to meet him! "Take notice that I am in Cambria, at Milford-Haven. What your own love will out of this advise you, follow." Strange that, being convinced as he is of her disloyalty, Posthumus should be so assured that she would fly at once to meet him! She had, he believed, given his bracelet to another, "and said she prized it once." Why, then, should she encounter the fatigue and the peril of escape from the Court to come to him? I can only suppose that, being utterly distracted for the time, he had lost the power of reasoning; and, mixing up the memory of her former love with the story of her late disloyalty, he had trusted to the old love to work upon her heart. As to what it does advise, there is no question. Her first words are "O for a horse with wings!" Then she plies Pisanio rapidly with questions as to how far it is to Milford-Haven. She, who has never been outside the precincts of the Court except on rare occasions, and then with all its stately retinue, cannot plod along like ordinary mortals, who would take a week to do it, but she must "glide thither in a day." Finding that Pisanio does not second her so eagerly as she expects, she, as it were, reminds him of his affection for his master:—

"Then, true Pisanio,
Who long'st, like me, to see thy lord; who long'st,—
Oh, let me bate,—but not like me—yet long'st,
But in a fainter kind:—oh, not like me;
For mine's beyond beyond."

How charming is all this! How touching, too, when we know what has passed, and what is to come! There is a warmth and tenderness in the whole of this scene that are all but unequalled.

The joy in Imogen's heart overflows upon her tongue. She cannot cease her questions. Everything, every place is "blessed" which brings her nearer to her lord.

"How far is it
To this same blessed Milford? And, by the way,
Tell me how Wales was made so happy as
To inherit such a haven?"—

a haven which to her seems Elysium, for Posthumus is there. Like a happy child, she goes running all round the subject; and then comes the thought, "How may we steal from hence?"—how excuse their absence when they return, which she apparently thinks will be soon?

"But first, how get hence?
Why should excuse be born or e'er begot?
We'll talk of that hereafter."

Her heart and thoughts are so full, that she does not notice Pisanio's hesitation when she bids him forthwith provide a riding-suit for her, "no costlier than would fit a franklin's housewife." And when he still prays her to consider, all further question is stopped by her kindly but decisive answer—

"I see before me, man : nor here, nor here,
Nor what ensues, but have a fog in them,
That I cannot look through."

Oh, how I enjoyed acting this scene! All had been so sad before. What a burst of happiness, what play of loving fancy, had scope here! It was like a bit of Rosalind in the forest. The sense of liberty, of breathing in the free air, and for a while escaping from the trammels of the Court and her persecutors there, gave light to the eyes and buoyancy to the step. Imogen is already in imagination at that height of happiness, at that "beyond beyond," which brings her into the presence of her banished lord. She can only "see before her"; she can look neither right nor left, nor to aught that may come after. These things have "a fog in them she cannot look through." "Away!" she says, "I prithee"; and stops Pisanio's further remonstrance with

"Do as I bid thee ! there's no more to say ;
Accessible is none but Milford way."

We can imagine with what delighted haste Imogen dons the riding-suit of the franklin's housewife ! Pisanio is barely allowed time to procure horses. Her women hurry on the preparations—for, as we have heard, they are "all sworn and honourable" ; and thus rejoicingly she starts on her sad, ill-omened journey. Pisanio has little to say during the last scene ; but what may not the actor express by tone, and look, and manner ? We know his grief for her, his bitter disappointment in her husband :—

"O master ! what a strange infection
Is fall'n into thy ear ! What false Italian
(As poisonous-tongued as handed) hath prevailed
On thy too ready hearing ? Disloyal ? No ;
She's punish'd for her truth. . . . O my master,
Thy mind to her is now as low as were
Thy fortunes !"

These thoughts are in his mind, and give the tone to his whole bearing. Had Imogen been less wrapped up in her own happiness, she must have noticed and questioned him about his strange unwillingness to obey his master's orders—wondered, too, at his showing no gladness at the thought of seeing him whom she believed that he, "next to herself," most longed to see again. But her eyes are full of that "fog" which obscures everything from view but the one bright spot—that blessed Milford where her heart is.

And now we have to think of Imogen as having escaped from her courtly prison-house. By her side rides "the true Pisanio," her one friend, and he is conveying her to her husband. What happy anticipations fill her heart ! Now she will be able to tell him all the "most pretty things" she had to say at their sad parting, when they were cut short by the entrance of her father, who,

"Like the tyrannous breathing of the north,
Shook all their buds from blowing."

Absorbed in her own sweet dreams, she does not notice the continued silence of her companion, until, having reached some deep mountain solitude, he tells her the place of meeting is near at

hand, and they dismount. It is at this moment that they come before us. Imogen, very weary with the unusual fatigue, looks anxiously round for the approach of Posthumus. For the first time she observes the strangeness of Pisanio's manner. "What is in thy mind," she exclaims in alarm,

"That makes thee stare thus? Wherefore breaks that sigh
From the inward of thee? One, but painted thus,
Would be interpreted a thing perplex'd
Beyond self-explication. . . . What's the matter?"

Pisanio, who can find no words to explain his mission, the purport of which can neither be slurred over nor lightened by any ray of comfort, simply offers her Posthumus's letter to himself. "Why," she exclaims, "tender'st thou that paper to me?" She sees the superscription is in her husband's hand. How the stories of Italian poisoning must have penetrated the English mind in Shakespeare's time! At once the thought of danger from this cause occurs to her:—

"That drug-damn'd Italy hath out-crafted him,
And he's at some hard point. Speak, man; thy tongue
May take off some extremity, which to read
Would be even mortal to me."

At last he does speak, but so mysteriously that she has to turn to the letter itself without any abatement of her terror.

My pen stops here. I know not how to write. Such a charge as that letter contains, to meet the eyes of such a creature! She has begun to read, full of apprehension for her husband's safety, and from his hand she now receives her deathblow. As the last word drops from her lips, her head bows in silence over the writing, and her body sinks as if some mighty rock had crushed her with its weight. These few words have sufficed to blight, to blacken, and to wither her whole life. The wonder is that she ever rises. I used to feel tied to the earth. "What need," says Pisanio, "to draw my sword? The paper hath cut her throat already. . . . What cheer, madam?" What indeed! In a dull kind of way, she, after a while, repeats the words in the letter: "False to his bed! What is it to be false?" Then, re-

remembering how so many weary nights have been passed by her in that bed, she asks—

“To lie in watch there, and to think on him?
To weep 'twixt clock and clock? If sleep charge nature,
To break it with a fearful dream of him,
And cry myself awake? That's false to his bed,
Is it?”

Her honour wedded to his honour, both must be wrecked together! That he should entertain one instant's suspicion of her takes the life out of her heart. No sin could be more utterly abhorrent to her nature than that of which she is accused; and this no one should know so well as her accuser, the companion of her life, the husband from whom no secret, not one of her most sacred feelings, has been withheld. It is because she feels this, that she can find no other solution to the mystery than that the “shes of Italy” have “betrayed mine interest and his honour.” Then flashes upon her like a flood of light Iachimo's account of how the “jolly Briton” passed his time,—of his opinion of woman, of “what she cannot choose but must be,” and of his contempt for any man who will his “free hours languish for assured bondage,”—and, worse still, how he could “slaver with lips as common as the stairs that mount the Capitol; join gripes with hands made hard with hourly falsehood; be “partnered with tomboys,” &c. All this comes back sharply on the memory of this poor bewildered creature, who holds no other clue to the motive, can imagine no other reason why the hand she loved should desire to murder her. In her agony she remembers that Iachimo, when accusing Posthumus of inconstancy, “looked like a villain”; but, now that his words have seemingly come true, she exclaims, “Now, methinks thy favour's good enough.” No suspicion crosses her mind that this same villain is in any way connected with her present suffering. The sleep which “seized her wholly,” and made her the victim of his treachery, was too deep for that; neither could the loss of her bracelet be at all connected in her mind with him. Oh, the exquisite cruelty of it all!—under false pretences to get her from the Court, plant her in a lonely desert, and there to take her life! The charge against

herself of being false appears to her but as a weak excuse for his own frailty. He is weary of her—desires to be free.

“Poor I am stale—a garment out of fashion ;
And, for I am richer than to hang by the walls,
I must be ripp'd :—to pieces with me !¹ Oh,
Men's vows are women's traitors !”

When she parted from Posthumus, we heard her say she was “not comforted to live, but that there is this jewel in the world that I may see again.” And now, what has that jewel proved? What, then, is life to her now? What left her but to show in death her devotion to her lord? Were ever words so full of anguish, of tender, passionate yearning, as hers?—

“Come, fellow, be thou honest ;
Do thou thy master's bidding : when thou see'st him,
A little witness my obedience. Look !
I draw the sword myself : take it, and hit
The innocent mansion of my love, my heart :
Fear not ; 'tis empty of all things but grief :
Thy master is not there, who was, indeed,
The riches of it. Do his bidding ; strike !”

She sees nothing before her but to die ; and when Pisanio refuses to “damn his hand” with the bloody task, she is only restrained from killing herself with his sword by the thought of the “divine prohibition” against self-slaughter. This “cravens her weak hand” ; but, renewing her entreaty to Pisanio, she tears open her dress, that so a readier access may be given¹ to her bosom. Then comes that touch so characteristic of the sovereign dramatist :—

“Come, here's my heart !
Something's afore't ! Soft, soft ; we'll no defence !
. What is here ?
The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus,
All turn'd to heresy ? Away, away,
Corrupters of my faith ! You shall no more
Be stomachers to my heart !”

¹ How womanly are Imogen's similes ! She would have watched Posthumus, as he sailed away, “till the diminution of space had pointed him sharp as my needle” ;—and here, “I must be ripp'd ; to pieces with me !” How Shakespeare thought woman's thoughts, with no woman then to embody them !

But even in the climax of her desolation and despair the thought occurs to her of that inevitable day of remorse, when Posthumus will feel that her contempt, for his sake, of the "suits of princely fellows" was not an "act of common passage, but a strain of rareness"; and uppermost in her heart is her grief

"To think, when thou shalt be disedged by her
That now thou tir'st on, how thy memory
Will then be pang'd by me. Prithee, dispatch!
The lamb entreats the butcher. Where's thy knife?
Thou art too slow to do thy master's bidding,
When I desire it too.

Pis. O gracious lady,
Since I received command to do this business,
I have not slept one wink.

Imo. Do't, and to bed then!

Pis. I'll wake mine eyeballs blind first.

Imo. Wherefore, then,
Did'st undertake it? . . .
. Why hast thou gone so far,
To be unbent, when thou hast ta'en thy stand,
The elected deer before thee?

Pis. But to win time
To lose so bad employment."

Praying her patience, Pisanio then tries to make her think, as he himself has believed from the first, that it cannot be "but that his master is abused."

"Some villain, ay, and singular in his art,
Hath done you both this cursèd injury."

Imogen, who can divine no motive but the one, will not entertain this idea. But Pisanio persists in his belief; and tells her he will send notice to Posthumus of her death, along with some bloody sign of it, obviously with the conviction that this will lead to some explanation of the delusion under which his master is labouring. Will she meanwhile go back to the Court? Swift is her answer. "No Court, no father!" What! face again "the father cruel, and the step-dame false," and the persistent wooing of the "profane fellow" her son? Pisanio has anticipated this answer; and finding his mistress ready even to seek a refuge abroad if necessary—"Hath Britain all the sun that shines?"—

he suggests that a way may be found by which she may haply come near

"The residence of Posthumus ; so nigh, at least,
That though his actions were not visible, yet
Report should render him hourly to your ear,
As truly as he moves."

The right chord has been touched by the hand of this most sympathetic and loyal of retainers. Posthumus may be seen, some clue at least be found to what is now all mystery and anguish. "Oh for such means !" Imogen exclaims,—

"Though peril to my modesty, not death on't,
I would adventure !"

As a woman, Pisanio knows it would be impossible for her to make her way alone to the camp of the Roman general, Caius Lucius, where tidings of Posthumus were most likely to reach her. Accordingly, he tells her she must don a page's dress, "forget to be a woman," be "ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy, and quarrelous as the weasel." How little of all this is Imogen in her male attire we shall presently see. But the object before her makes all hesitation vanish:—

"I see into thy end, and am almost
A man already,"

she exclaims, and hails with readiness Pisanio's announcement, that he has by anticipation provided for her "doublet, hat, hose, all that answer to them," with which she may present herself before the noble Lucius. Pisanio adds—

"Desire his service, tell him
Wherein you're happy, (which you'll make him know,
If that his head have ear in music)."

She is sure to be well received by him, "for he is honourable, and, doubling that, most holy." He must himself return to the Court, to avoid being suspected of having assisted in her escape, and at parting gives her a box of medicine, in the belief that, in case of illness, it "will drive away distemper." It had been given to him by the queen, and he believes it to be what

she professed it was ; for, treacherous as he knows her, he has no suspicion that she would turn poisoner. It is only the physician Cornelius who suspects the queen's purpose, and therefore gives her drugs which he leads her to believe will kill, but which, though suspending animation for a time, will, like Juliet's potion, allow the patient to "awake as from a pleasant sleep." So for the moment they separate, that she may don her man's apparel. But they obviously meet again, when Pisanio conducts her to some mountain-top, from which he points out Milford to her, which then seemed "within a ken" (Act iii. sc. 6), but which she was to find, as inexperienced mountain-travellers always do find, was much farther off than it looked. Naturally he would not leave his "gracious mistress" until he had seen that her equipment was complete, and could start her fairly on her way.

What a picture Imogen presents as we see her next (Act iii. sc. 6)—alone, among the wild hills, in a strange dress, in a strange world—wandering along unknown paths, still far away from Milford-Haven ! Oh, that name, Milford-Haven ! I never hear it spoken, see it written, without thinking of Imogen. Weary and footsore, she wanders on, with a dull ache at her heart—far worse to bear than hunger,—yearning, yet dreading, to get to Milford, that "blessed Milford," as once she thought it. When I read of the great harbour and docks which are now there, I cannot help wishing that one little sheltering corner could be found to christen as "Imogen's Haven." Never did heroine or woman better deserve to have her name thus consecrated and remembered. For two nights she has made the ground her bed. What food she had with her has long been exhausted ; and there is, oh, so little spur of hope or promise in her heart to urge her onwards ! She complains but little. The tender nursling of the Court learns, by the roughest lessons, what goes on in that outer world of which she has seen nothing. "I see," she says, "a man's life is a tedious one." Still, with the patient nobility of her nature, her "resolution helps her." She has set herself a task, and she will carry it through. In her heart, despite what she has said to Pisanio, there is still a corner in which he "that was the riches of it" continues to hold a place—for her love is of the kind

that alters not "where it alteration finds"; and she had learned thoroughly love's first and greatest lesson—fidelity.

It was this scene, and those at the cave immediately following, which, as I have said, laid the strongest hold on my young imagination. It seems so strange, and yet so fitting, that, in her greatest grief and loneliness, Imogen should be led by an unseen hand to her natural protectors, and that they, by an irrepressible instinct, should, at the first sight, be moved to love, admire, and cherish her. Before she reaches the cave, which is to prove a brief but happy haven of refuge for her, we have learned who its inhabitants are. We have been told how the old courtier and soldier Belarius, in revenge for having been wronged, insulted, and banished by Cymbeline, had, with the help of their nurse Euriphile, stolen his two young sons, and brought them up in a mountain-fastness as his own; how he had taught them all the arts he knew himself, and into what princely youths they had grown, with but one desire ungratified,—to see the world, which they knew only by report, and take some part in its stirring life. How delightful a relief after the overwhelming pathos of the previous scene is the accident which brings these noble spirits into contact with a being like Imogen, in whom all that makes a woman most winning to unspoiled manly nature is unconsciously felt through the boyish disguise! And she—how well prepared is she to take comfort in the gentle, loving thoughtfulness shown to her by these "kind creatures"!

Think of her, the daintily nurtured woman, as she comes to their cave, spent with fatigue, and made desperate by hunger! On her way she has met two beggars, whom she may have helped with money, but who could not help her with food. They have told her she "could not miss her way"; yet she has missed it. How touching the vein of thought this incident opens in her mind!—

"Will poor folks lie,
That have afflictions on them? . . . Yes; no wonder,
When rich ones scarce tell true."

Then, more in pity than reproach, she adds, "My dear lord, thou art one o' the false ones!" We see that he is her "dear lord" still. But the thought of him brings back her heart-sick-

ness, and takes away her hunger,—although just before, she was at the “point to sink for food.” Then she perceives the entrance to the cave of Belarius, and the path to it.

“ ’Tis some savage hold :
’Twere best not call ; I dare not call.”

In my first rehearsals of this scene, I instinctively adopted a way of my own of entering the cave which I was told was unusual. My dear friend and master approved of my conception. Mr Elton, my Pisanio, liked it much ; and Mr Macready, after expressing many apprehensions, thought I might try it. You have seen, and therefore I need not dwell on it more than to remind you that Imogen’s natural terror was certain to make her exaggerate tenfold the possible dangers which that cave might cover, from wild animals, or, still worse, from savage men. Remember her Court training, her entire unfitness for, and ignorance of, anything unlike the life she had been reared in,—for, as she says herself—

“ Plenty and peace breed cowards ; hardness ever
Of hardness is mother.”

But for sheer famine,—which, “ere it clean o’erthrow nature, makes it valiant,”—she would rather have gone away, given up the thought of help, and laid her down to die, “as to a bed, that longing she’d been sick for.” The “Ho ! who’s here ?” was given, as you may remember, with a voice as faint and full of terror as could be,—followed by an instant shrinking behind the nearest bush, tree, or rock. Then another and a little bolder venture : “If anything that’s civil, speak !” Another recoil. Another pause : “If savage, take or lend ! Ho !” Gaining a little courage, because of the entire silence : “No answer ? then I’ll enter !”—peering right and left, still expecting something to pounce out upon her, and keeping ready, in the last resort, to fly. Then the sword, which had been an encumbrance before, and something to be afraid of, comes into her mind. If the dreaded enemy be as cowardly as herself, it will keep him at bay :—

“ Best draw my sword ; and if mine enemy
But fear the sword like me he’ll scarcely look on’t.”

And so, with great dread, but still greater hunger, and holding the good sword straight before her, she creeps slowly into the cave.

What a vision is that which Imogen presents, as she sits in the semi-darkness of their rude home, to Belarius and his two foster-sons as they return from the chase! Looking in, he warns them back:—

“Stay ; come not in !
But that it eats our victuals, I should think
Here were a fairy.

Gui. What's the matter, sir ?

Bel. By Jupiter, an angel ! or, if not,
An earthly paragon ! Behold divineness
No elder than a boy !”

Startled by their voices, Imogen comes forward, still trembling with fear, to explain why she had entered unbidden into their cave:—

“Good masters, harm me not :
Before I entered here, I call'd ; and thought
To have begg'd or bought what I have took. Good troth,
I have stolen nought ; nor would not, though I had found
Gold strew'd i' the floor.”

How that sweet pleading figure, that voice so wistful, so irresistible in its tender beseeching pathos, finds an instant passage to their hearts! When she offers money for what she has eaten, the suggestion is received with a burst of surprise by the young mountaineers, which she mistakes for anger!—

“I see you're angry :
Know, if you kill me for my fault, I should
Have died had I not made it.”

The young fellows, abashed that their words have caused fresh alarm when they meant but kindness, let Belarius inquire her name, and whither she is going. She gives herself an apt one—Fidele—and explains that she is on her way to Milford to join a kinsman who has there embarked for Italy. Belarius tries to reassure her by words of cordial kindness, and bids the boys, who are hanging shyly back, to give her welcome. They do so, each in a way that marks the difference of their characters. Guiderius, the elder, and more likely to be sensitive to the

womanly element that gives this seeming boy so much of her charm, says, "Were you a woman, youth, I should woo hard but be your groom." Arviragus accosts her with words that must have been more welcome to her:—

"I'll make't my comfort,
He is a man ; I'll love him as my brother :
And such a welcome as I'd give to him,
After long absence, such is yours. Most welcome !
Be sprightly, for you fall 'mongst friends !"

"'Mongst friends !" murmurs Imogen to herself, adding, as if to give voice to the prophetic instinct which draws her towards them :—

"If brothers?—would it had been so, that they
Had been my father's sons ! then had my prize
Been less ; and so more equal ballasting
To thee, Posthumus."

Posthumus, ever Posthumus, uppermost in her mind ! As a fresh spasm of pain passes over her face at the thought of him, Belarius says to the boys, "He rings at some distress" ; and they, true knightly spirits as they are, are all eagerness to avert it :—

"*Gui.* Would I could free't !
Arv. Or I, whate'er it be,
What pain it cost, what danger !"

While the common blood of near relationship is warming the hearts of these noble boys, Imogen recognises the true ring of fine breeding in them. Of Belarius she takes little note. Her thoughts centre upon them. No prince or paladin, she thinks, with that fine penetrating appreciation of character which Shakespeare marks as one of her qualities, could "outpeer these twain" :—

"Pardon me, gods !
I'd change my sex to be companion with them,
Since Leonatus false."

She still keeps aloof with natural timidity, but at length yields to their repeated prayers that she will "draw near," and share their supper with them in the "rude place they live in."

We can imagine the scene in the cave that evening. When they have supped, they would "mannerly demand" the story of the boy, which, we hear afterwards, was told in a very guarded way :—

Gui. He said he was gentle, but unfortunate ;
Dishonestly afflicted, but yet honest.

Arr. Thus did he answer me ; yet said, hereafter
I might know more."

What that "more" was, how little could they guess? By this time they would have found their softest skins to make a couch for one so delicate, which she, with all a woman's instinct, would wrap well around her limbs. Then, forgetting fatigue, she would sing or recite to them some tale, of which we know she had many well stored in her memory. How the charm her presence had wrought would deepen upon them as the night wore away, and how the dreams that filled their sleep would carry on the sweet dream of the waking hours which they had passed by her side !

How long Imogen remains their guest we are not told—some days it must have been, else all the things they speak of could not have happened. For the first time, their cave is felt to be a home. On their return from their day's sport, a fresh smell of newly strewn rushes, we may imagine, pervades it. Where the light best finds its way into the cavern are seen such dainty wild-flowers as she has found in her solitary rambles. Fresh water from the brook is there. The vegetables are washed, and cut into quaint "characters" to garnish the dishes ; a savoury odour of herbs comes from the "sauced" broth, and a smile, sweet in their eyes beyond all other sweetness, salutes them as they hurry in, each vying with the other who first shall catch it. When the meal is ready, they wait upon Fidele, trying with the daintiest morsels to tempt her small appetite ; and, when it is over, and she is couched upon their warmest skins, they lie down at her feet, while she sings, "angel-like," to them, or tells them tales of "high emprise and chivalry," such as become a king's daughter. Even the old Belarius feels the subtle charm, and wonders, yet not grudgingly, to see how this stranger takes a place in the hearts of his two boys even before himself :—

“I’m not their father ; yet who this should be
Doth miracle itself, loved before me.”

Meanwhile great events have taken place at Cymbeline’s Court. He has refused to acknowledge the claim for tribute presented from the Roman Emperor by his envoy Caius Lucius, who, after announcing that it will be claimed at the point of the sword, craves and receives a safe-conduct for himself overland to Milford-Haven. Cymbeline has prepared for the eventuality of war, and his preparations are so far advanced that he looks forward with confidence to the issue. The kingly qualities of the man are well shown, and contrast with his weakness in his domestic relations. And now he misses his daughter, whom he has not had time to think of for some days :—

“My gentle queen,
Where is our daughter ? She hath not appear’d
Before the Roman, nor to us hath tender’d
The duty of the day.”

An attendant is despatched to summon her to the presence ; while the queen, continuing to play the part of a seeming tender mother to her, who, as we know, “was as a scorpion to her sight”—to her whose life she had intended to have “ta’en off by poison,”—explains, that since the exile of Posthumus, Imogen has kept in close retirement, the cure whereof

“’Tis Time must do. Beseech your majesty,
Forbear sharp speeches to her. She’s a lady
So tender of rebukes, that words are strokes,
And strokes death to her.”

When the attendant returns after finding the princess’s chambers locked and tenantless, the king is seriously alarmed. His conscience smites him when he thinks to what his unkindness may have led :—

“Her doors lock’d ?
Not seen of late ? Grant, heavens, that which I fear
Prove false !”

And he rushes away, followed by Cloten, to find his worst fears confirmed. Pisanio gone, and Imogen ! In this the queen sees a step gained in her plot to raise her son to the throne. Pisanio’s

absence, she hopes, may be caused by his having swallowed the drug—a poison, as she believes—which she had given him. As for Imogen, she is gone

“To death or to dishonour ; and my end
Can make good use of either : she being down,
I have the placing of the British crown.”

The king, Cloten tells her on his return, is so wild with rage, that “none dare come about him.” The fitter, then, to fall an easy prey to her cajoling ! Accordingly she hurries away to reinforce her sway over him, “by watching, weeping, tendance,” and affectation of sympathy, and so to move him by her craft “to work her son into the adoption of the crown.”

Meantime this son is working for himself a very different ending to his ignoble life. Seeing Pisanio, who has just returned, he accosts him with his usual braggart air :—

“Where is thy lady ?
. Close villain !
I’ll have this secret from thy heart, or rip
Thy heart to find it !”

Pisanio, not knowing how else to account for Imogen’s absence, and to mislead Cloten, gives him the letter from Posthumus, appointing the meeting at Milford-Haven,—one of those “scriptures of the loyal Leonatus,” which he had picked up when she tore them from her breast.

“Or this,” he says to himself, “or perish !”

“She’s far enough ; and what he learns by this
May prove his travel, not her danger. . . .
I’ll write to my lord she’s dead. O Imogen,
Safe mayst thou wander, safe return again !”

Cloten, who meantime has been reading and re-reading the letter—for we have been told how dull his wits are—sees in it an opening for the revenge on Posthumus and Imogen on which he has set his heart. He will get from Pisanio a suit of his master’s clothes ; and Pisanio, who has no reason to withhold them from the silly fellow, agrees to let him have the same suit that Posthumus wore when he took leave of Imogen. Thus, in the very garment which she had lately told him she held “in more respect

than his noble and natural person," will he pursue the princess to Milford-Haven, kill Posthumus before her eyes, and "knock her back to the Court—foot her home again. She hath despised me rejoicingly, and I'll be merry in my revenge."

When we next see Cloten, he has reached the spot to which Pisanio, believing Imogen to be by this time in the service of the Roman general, felt he might safely direct him as the meeting-place of the lovers. It is near the cave of Belarius. Cloten is more than ever enamoured of his personal appearance in the garments of Posthumus. "The lines of my body," he says, "are as well drawn as his; no less young, more strong"—sentences skilfully introduced by the poet to account for his body being presently mistaken by Imogen, when she sees it lying headless, for that of Posthumus. Drawing his sword, he goes off in search of those who, he fancies, vapouring fool as he is, will be his easy victims. Straightway from the cave comes forth the group that inhabit it. Imogen, with all their care, is still sick—and who can wonder, with mind and body so sore? Belarius would have her remain in the cave until they return from hunting. "Brother," says Arviragus, "stay here; are we not brothers?" At their first meeting he had said he would love her as a brother, and every hour since had deepened the feeling on his part. Imogen can but answer ambiguously—

"So man and man should be;
But clay and clay differs in dignity,
Whose dust is both alike. I am very sick."

Upon this Guiderius, who, though of a more robust, is yet evidently of a more sensitive nature, and who from the first had wished Fidele were a woman, offers to remain behind to tend him. But now Imogen makes light of her ailment, being in truth only too glad to be left alone with her heart-sickness, to which she can then give way. Gentle and kind as her companions are, she is upon the stretch when they are by, dreading to be further questioned as to her story, and, by reason of her natural disposition to lose herself in others, desiring also in their absence to do her utmost to contribute to their comfort and enjoyment. She cannot deny that she is ill—

“But your being by me
Cannot amend me : society is no comfort
To one not sociable.”

Then she adds playfully, to set them at ease in leaving her—

“I am not very sick,
Since I can reason of it. Pray you, trust me here ;
I'll rob none but myself.”

Again do both the boys proffer in warmest terms the assurance of their love, avowing it to be deeper than that for their supposed father—the only love they have ever known ; but as she still deprecates their absenting themselves from the chase, they yield to her wish. Their tenderness and perfect courtesy have gone to her very heart ; and as she moves lingeringly back towards the cave, she says—

“These are kind creatures. Gods, what lies I have heard !
Our courtiers say all's savage but at Court.
Experience, oh, thou disprovest report !
I am sick still—heart-sick. Pisanio,
I'll now taste of thy drug.”

Her companions watch her as she retires. There is something so touching, so especially and mysteriously sad about her look and movements to-day, that they will not go without a fresh assurance to her that they will soon be back—

“*Arr.* We'll not be long away.
Bel. Pray, be not sick,
For you must be our housewife.”

“Well or ill, I am bound to you !” are Imogen's words, as she disappears into the cave, with a wistful smile that insensibly awakens fresh perplexity in their hearts, as we see by what follows :—

“*Bel.* This youth, howe'er distress'd, appears he hath had
Good ancestors.
Arr. How angel-like he sings !
Gui. But his neat cookery ! He cut our roots in characters,
And sauced our broths, as Juno had been sick
And he her dieter.”

Arv. Nobly he yokes
A smiling with a sigh. . . .
Gui. I do note
That grief and patience, rooted in him both,
Mingle their spurs together."

What a picture do these sentences bring before us of a true lady and princess,—not sitting apart, brooding over her own great grief, that her dear lord should be "one o' the false ones," but bestirring herself to make their cavern-home as attractive and pleasant to them as only the touch and feeling of a refined woman could!

They are interrupted by the entrance of Cloten, who, not seeing them at first, exclaims, "I cannot find these runagates!" Belarius, who has seen Cloten at the Court many years before, recognises him as the queen's son, and, thinking that the phrase applies to himself and his companions, suspects that some ambush has been set for them. He and Arviragus are hurried off by Guiderius, to "search what companies are near," while he remains to confront this stranger. Cloten, catching sight of them as they retire, tries to stop them by recourse to his usual strain of bullying arrogance:—

"What are you,
That fly me thus? Some villain mountaineers?
I have heard of such. What slave art thou?"

Of all tones, this is the least likely to move the manly spirit of Guiderius. To Cloten's demand that he should yield to him, he replies scornfully—

"To who? To thee? What art thou? Have not I
An arm as big as thine? a heart as big?
Thy words, I grant, are bigger; for I wear not
My dagger in my mouth. Say what thou art,
Why I should yield to thee!
Clo. Thou villain base,
Know'st me not by my clothes?"

This only provokes in Guiderius utter contempt for his assailant. "Thou art some fool; I am loath to beat thee." As little is he awed by Cloten's further announcement of his name, and of the fact that he is son to the queen. Fool to the last,

Cloten now attacks Guiderius, with perfect confidence that he must make short work, first of him, and then of his companions; and they go out fighting, with the result, as we presently hear, that Guiderius disarms him, cuts off his head with his own sword and casts it into the river, that it may thence "to the sea, and tell the fishes he's the queen's son, Cloten." To die by the hands of this right royal youth seems too good a death for such a creature. Yet, remembering his persecution of Imogen, and his brutality of intention towards her, it is most fit that her own brother should be her avenger, and so commence the work of retribution; the next stage of which is the death of Cloten's mother,—who dies in mad despair when she hears her son is dead,—having first made confession of her deadly designs, and thereby solved many mysteries which would otherwise have been difficult to clear up (Act v. sc. 5).

When Belarius hears of Cloten's death, he is naturally apprehensive that the search which will be made for him may lead to the discovery of their mountain retreat. "We'll hunt no more to-day," he says, "nor seek for danger where there's no profit;" and he sends Arviragus to the cave, telling him, "You and Fidele play the cooks." "Poor sick Fidele!" Arviragus exclaims.

"I'll willingly to him : to gain his colour,
I'd let a parish of such Cloten's blood,
And praise myself for charity."

What a change Imogen has wrought upon the young pupils of Belarius! What charming features in their character have been developed by her influence! This change we infer from what he says of them, while he stays without, waiting for the return of Guiderius:—

"O thou goddess,
Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
In these two princely boys! They are as gentle
As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
Their royal blood enchafed, as the rudest wind,
That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
And make him stoop to the vale."

Guiderius returns to tell that he has sent Cloten's "clotpoll

down the stream, in embassy to his mother." Suddenly they hear the "ingenious instrument" which Belarius had made, and which "solemn thing" had not been set in motion since the death of Euriphile, the supposed mother of the boys. Why should this be? What does Arviragus mean? The answer is given by his issuing from the cave, "bearing Imogen as dead in his arms." I know not with what emotions this passage is received in the theatre, for I have never seen the play acted; but, often as I have read it, I can never read it afresh without a rush of tears to my eyes:—

“ *Arr.* The bird is dead,
That we have made so much on. I had rather
Have skipp'd from sixteen years of age to sixty
To have turn'd my leaping-time into a crutch,
Than have seen this.

Gui. O sweetest, fairest lily
My brother wears thee not the one-half so well
As when thou grew'st thyself.

Bel. Thou blesséd thing !
Jove knows what man thou mightst have made ; but I,
Thou diedst, a most rare boy, of melancholy.
How found you him ?

Arr. Stark, as you see :
Thus smiling, as some fly had tickled slumber,
Not as death's dart, being laugh'd at ; his right cheek
Reposing on a cushion.

Gui. Where?

Arr. O' the floor ;
His arms thus leagued. I thought he slept, and put
My clouted brogues from off my feet, whose rudeness
Answer'd my steps too loud.

Gui. Why, he but sleeps :
If he be gone, he'll make his grave a bed ;
With female fairies will his tomb be haunted,
And worms will not come to thee.

Arr. With fairest flowers,
While summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I'll sweeten thy sad grave. Thou shalt not lack
The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azured harebell, like thy veins ; no, nor
The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,
Out-sweeten'd not thy breath ; . . .

Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
To winter-ground thy corse.

Gui. Prithee, have done ;
 And do not play in wench-like words with that
 Which is so serious. Let us bury him,
 And not protract with admiration what
 Is now new debt.—To the grave !
Arr. Say, where shall's lay him ?
Gui. By good Euriphile, our mother.
Arr. Be't so :
 And let us, Polydore, . . . sing him to the ground,
 As once our mother."

Then says the deep-hearted Guiderius, "I cannot sing; I'll weep, and word it with thee." Belarius, who has stood silently by, now says :—

"Great griefs, I see, medicine the less ; for Cloten
 Is quite forgot. He was a queen's son, boys ;
 And though he came our enemy, remember
 He was paid for that. . . . Our foe was princely ;
 And though you took his life, as being our foe,
 Yet bury him as a prince.
Gui. Pray you, fetch him hither.
 Thersites' body is as good as Ajax',
 When neither are alive.
Arr. If you'll go fetch him,
 We'll say our song the while. Brother, begin."

And then they repeat that sweetest dirge that ever was devised by aching heart for those who, having done their worldly task, have gone to a better than mortal home—

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun," &c.

When Belarius returns with the body of Cloten, they lay it by Imogen's side. Belarius will not leave the poor "dead bird," even for a little, without a further tribute :—

"Here's a few flowers ; but, about midnight, more :
 The herbs that have on them cold dew o' the night
 Are strewings fitt'st for graves.—Upon their faces.
 You were as flowers, now wither'd : even so
 These herblets shall, which we upon you strew.
 Come on, away ; apart, upon our knees."

So do they retire to pray and meditate, purposing to return at a later hour to lay the bodies in the grave. Well do I remember

my delight, in my early readings of the play, that only flowers were put upon Imogen's face, and that she awakened so soon after! Perhaps their cool fresh fragrance helped her to recover from the swoon. Had she lain till midnight, no doubt the burial rites would have been completed, and the earth—oh, horrible!—would thus have covered up and smothered her. When "about midnight" they return with the night-flowers, to complete the last sad rite of burial, what must have been their surprise to find that their office had been anticipated—no trace, at least, to be seen of the bodies which they had so lately left!

Scarcely have they gone apart to pray, before Imogen awakes, and finds by her side what she thinks the dead body of her husband. Though the semblance of life has been suspended by Pisanio's drug, her sleep has not been dreamless. She awakens asking her way to Milford-Haven from some one, who she fancies tells her it is still six miles distant. The dream is still with her:—

"I thank you.—By yond bush?—Pray, how far thither?
'Ods pittikins! can it be six miles yet?—
I have gone all night.—'Faith, I'll lie down and sleep."

Then, becoming conscious of something by her side:—

"But soft! no bedfellow!—O gods and goddesses!"

She is now fully awake, feels the flowers about her, and sees the blood-stained body by her side:—

"These flowers are like the pleasures of the world;
This bloody man, the care on't. I hope I dream;
For so I thought I was a cave-keeper,
And cook to honest creatures; but 'tis not so."

Surprise combines with fear to overwhelm her:—

"Good faith,
I tremble still with fear. But if there be
Yet left in heaven as small a drop of pity
As a wren's eye, fear'd gods, a part of it!"

She looks about her; the cave, the rocks, the woodland that she knew, are there:—

"The dream's here still: even when I wake, it is
Without me, as within me; not imagined, felt."

And yet how comes it that she should be lying beside a headless man? On looking closer she recognises the garments of Posthumus—the figure too—'tis very Posthumus!

"I know the shape of his leg; this is his hand;
His foot Mercurial; his Martial thigh;
The brawns of Hercules: but his Jovial face—
Murder in heaven?—How!—'Tis gone."

At once her thoughts fix on Pisanio as having betrayed them both with his forged letters. It is he, "conspired with that irregular devil Cloten," that has cut off her lord. All former distrust of that "dear lord" vanishes on the instant, and he is restored to the place in her heart and imagination which he had held before. They have both been the victims of the blackest treachery, and Pisanio, "damned Pisanio," hath—

"From this most bravest vessel of the world
Struck the main-top!"

Think of the anguish of her cry:—

"O Posthumus! Alas,
Where is thy head? where's that? Ay me! where's that?
Pisanio might have killed thee at the heart,
And left this head on. How should this be? Pisanio—
'Tis he, and Cloten. Malice and lucre in them
Have laid this woe here. Oh, 'tis pregnant, pregnant!
The drug he gave me, which he said was precious
And cordial to me, have I not found it
Murderous to the senses? That confirms it home!
All curses madded Hecuba gave the Greeks,
And mine to boot, be darted on thee!"

And with one long agonised wail, "Oh, my lord, my lord!" she falls senseless upon the body.

There she is presently found by Caius Lucius and his followers, as they pass on their way to Milford-Haven to meet the legions from Gallia, and a select corps from Italy "under the conduct of the bold Iachimo," who have arrived there for the purpose of enforcing the tribute from Cymbeline. On perceiving the body of Cloten, Lucius exclaims:—

“Soft, ho ! What trunk is here
Without his top ? The ruin speaks that sometime
It was a worthy building. How ! A page !
Or dead, or sleeping on him ? But dead rather ;
For nature doth abhor to make his bed
With the defunct, or sleep upon the dead.
Let’s see the boy’s face.”

They raise him from the body, and Lucius asks in language full of sympathy, “What is thy interest in this sad wreck ? How came it ? Who is it ? What art thou ?” What a world of pathos is in her answer—

“I am nothing ; or if not,
Nothing to be were better.”

Truly may she say so ! All interest in life is over. She is full, too, of self-reproach, to add to the bitterness of her loss. How could she slander, even in thought, the man who was, in her esteem, “worth any woman,” so much worthier than herself that he had “overbought her almost the sum he paid” ? Her words now shall at least make some atonement :—

“This was my master,
A very valiant Briton, and a good,
That here by mountaineers lies slain. Alas !
There are no more such masters : I may wander
From east to occident, cry out for service,
Try many, all good, serve truly, never
Find such another master.

Luc. ‘Lack, good youth,
Thou mov’st no less with thy complaining, than
Thy master in bleeding. Say his name, good friend.

Imo. Richard du Champ. [*Aside.*] If I do lie, and do
No harm by it, though the gods hear, I hope
They’ll pardon it !—Say you, sir ?

Luc. Thy name ?

Imo. Fidele, sir.

Luc. Thou dost approve thyself the very same :
Thy name well fits thy faith, thy faith thy name.
Will take thy chance with me ? I will not say
Thou shalt be so well master’d, but, be sure,
No less beloved.”

Here we see how the very tone and look of Imogen, apart from the boy’s desolate state, impress Caius Lucius, as they have done

all those who have ever been near her, with their resistless charm. He continues:—

“The Roman emperor's letters,
Sent by a consul to me, should not sooner
Than thine own worth prefer thee. Go with me.”

The boy says he will follow, but first must see all honour paid to his master's grave. It shall be as deep, to hide him from the flies, as these “poor pickaxes” (his hands) can dig. And when it has been strewn with wild wood-leaves and weeds, and he has “on it said a century of prayers” as best he can through choking tears and sighs, he will then take leave of the master, the like of whom the world holds “from east to occident” no other, and will follow Lucius—“So please you entertain me.” Imogen promises no new service to this new master. She looks forward to nothing. The strength of her heart, her hopes, her usefulness, will all be buried in the grave thus left behind. Not to go with this kind man who offers help would have seemed ungracious; and to keep up her disguise for a while will leave Imogen more free to nurse her grief. Alas! alas! all the strangers to her are kind and pitiful! but the one is gone, done horribly to death, who could alone have brought comfort to her heart! If anything could have drawn her towards this gentle, manly Roman, it would have been the way he assures the boy that he shall be taken into his service, and treated by him as a father rather than a master. “My friends,” he adds,

“The boy hath taught us manly duties: let us
Find out the prettiest daisied plot we can,
And make him with our pikes and partisans
A grave. . . . Boy, he is preferr'd
By thee to us; and he shall be interr'd
As soldiers can. Be cheerful; wipe thine eyes;
Some falls are means the happier to arise.”

That she should be “cheerful,” we know to be impossible:—

“All was ended now—the hope, the fear, and the sorrow;
All the aching of heart, the restless unsatisfied longing;
All the dull deep pain, and constant anguish of patience.”

But from what we have seen of her before, we know that she will fight bravely with her own heart, and will not let others be made unhappy by her grief. To forget is past her power, but she will repay the kindness shown her by throwing herself zealously into the duties of her position. Lucius will keep the boy near him, employing him in light tasks about his tent. He will note with what noble gentleness and patience these duties are performed. For amid the noisy stir of the camp, as in the silent solitude of the cave, Imogen, with the self-abnegation and devotion to others which distinguish her, bears her heavy burden silently and alone. Never master, as Lucius afterwards tells us, had

“A page so kind, so duteous, diligent
So tender over his occasions, true,
So feat, so nurse-like.”

We must leave Imogen for a while, for the events are now hurrying on which are to bring her sorrows to a happy close.

At the opening of the fifth act we find Posthumus, on the eve of battle, in the ground betwixt the Roman and the British camps, having been brought over, as he tells us, “among the Italian gentry, to fight against his lady’s kingdom.” From the hour the “bloody cloth” reached him, which Pisanio has sent as the evidence of Imogen’s death, he has been upon the rack. What was he, that, even were she the guilty thing he thought her, he should have sent her from the world with her sins unshriven?—

“Gods! if you
Should have ta’en vengeance on my faults, I never
Had lived to put on this: so had you saved
The noble Imogen to repent, and struck
Me, wretch, more worth your vengeance.”

Never, never can he have been without misgiving that all Iachimo had said of her was untrue. Since her supposed death, “the idea of her life” must have “sweetly crept into his study of imagination,” and pictured her there as the sweet, pure, noble creature who had fostered all that was best and highest in himself. Again have come back to him, in all their vivid freshness,

her beauty, her "gracious parts," her bright mind, the grace and colour of all things that she did.

"'Tis enough
That, Britain, I have kill'd thy mistress. Peace!
I'll give no wound to thee. . . . I'll disrobe me
Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself
As does a Briton peasant: so I'll fight
Against the part I come with; so I'll die
For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
Is, every breath, a death."

And to what purpose he does fight we soon see. The gods *have* "put the strength of the Leonati" in him for which he prays, and so made him a main instrument in bringing about the restoration of his Imogen to his arms, and in avenging the wrong wrought upon them both by Iachimo. In the next scene Posthumus encounters Iachimo, and after disarming him, he leaves him unscathed, probably from a noble impulse not to take the life of a man towards whom he felt a profound personal repugnance. Iachimo, who has not recognised Posthumus in his peasant's garb, thinks that his guilt has robbed him of his manhood, and that the air of the country, whose princess he has belied, "revengingly enfeebles" him. How else should one of its mere "carles" have subdued him?

The battle continues, success wavering from side to side. At first the Romans have the best of it, and Cymbeline is taken. Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus arrive, and rally the flying Britons. The stir of war, we have been shown in a previous scene, has roused the princely ardour of the youths, and at all risks they have resolved to strike a blow in the tented field for their country's sake. How they and Belarius fight, Posthumus, who had come to their aid, afterwards tells us in one of those passages written at a white-heat, in which Shakespeare's patriotic spirit revels. "Athwart the lane," he says, "an ancient soldier," "with two striplings,"

"Made good the passage; cried to those that fled
'Our Britain's harts die flying, not our men:
To darkness fleet souls that fly backwards! Stand.'
. These three,
Three thousand confident, in act as many—
. . . —with this word, 'Stand, stand,'

Accommodated by the place, more charming
With their own nobleness (which could have turned
A distaff to a lance), gilded pale looks,
Part shame, part spirit renew'd ; that some, turn'd coward
But by example (oh, a sin in war,
Damn'd in the first beginners !) 'gan to look
The way that they did, and to grin like lions
Upon the pikes o' the hunters," &c.

The tide of battle is turned, Posthumus himself performing prodigies of valour in the rescue of Cymbeline, while he seeks vainly for the death he cannot find :—

"I, in mine own woe charm'd,
Could not find death where I did hear him groan,
Nor feel him where he struck. . . .
. . . Well, I will find him."

He will resume the Roman dress, and so be taken prisoner :—

"For me, my ransom's death :
On either side I come to spend my breath,
Which neither here I'll keep nor bear again,
But end it by some means for Imogen."

His wish is gratified. Some British soldiers bring him a willing captive to the presence of the king. A crowd of prisoners is already there, among them Iachimo, Lucius, and with them Imogen, who has obviously followed Lucius, despite his entreaties to the contrary, through all the chances of the battle, hoping, like Posthumus, to meet in death a release from her now hopeless sorrow. Here the fine character of Lucius is again shown. He asks no mercy for himself. "Sufficeth a Roman with a Roman's heart can suffer." His only care is for the boy who has served him so well :—

"This one thing only,
I will entreat : my boy, a Briton born,
Let him be ransom'd. . . .
. . . He hath done no Briton harm,
Though he have served a Roman. Save him, sir,
And spare no blood besides."

Cymbeline is immediately struck by the boy's resemblance to some erewhile familiar face. At once his heart warms towards

him. "Boy, thou hast looked thyself into my grace, and art mine own." Not only does he give him life; he bids him, as a further assurance of his favour, ask "what boon thou wilt,"—

"Yea, though thou do demand a prisoner,
The noblest ta'en."

Both Cymbeline and Lucius naturally think that he will demand the life of his master. But "alack," as Imogen says, "there's other work in hand." She has in the meantime espied Iachimo among the Roman prisoners, and noticed upon his finger what was once her best treasure, "the diamond that was her mother's," and which she had given to Posthumus at parting. She now remembers that it was not on the dead hand which she had lately thought her husband's. How had Iachimo come by it? Honourably or dishonourably? This must before all things be explained. Cymbeline, the more he notes the boy, is the more drawn to him. He marks his perplexed looks, his fixed gaze upon Iachimo. "Speak!" he says, "Wilt have him live? Is he thy kin? Thy friend?" Imogen asks permission to tell him in private the reason of her conduct, and they step aside that she may do so. How intently she has been absorbed in watching Iachimo is further shown by the circumstance that, though near her late companions of the cave, she has not observed them. They have been struck with amazement to see alive the boy Fidele whom they had left for dead. Belarius will not believe it is he:—

"Peace, peace! See further; he eyes us not; forbear.
Creatures may be alike: were't he, I'm sure
He would have spoke to us."

Pisanio has no such doubts. "It is my mistress!" he murmurs in delight to himself.

"Since she is living, let the time run on
To good or bad!"

And now Imogen comes forward with Cymbeline, who bids the seeming page stand by his side and make his demand aloud, commanding Iachimo at the same time to answer him frankly on

pain of torture. My boon, says Imogen, is, "that this gentleman may render of whom he had this ring?" Amazed at a question so strange, Posthumus mutters to himself, "What's that to him?" Remorse has so far turned to penitence in Iachimo, that he is "glad to be constrained to utter" what "torments him to conceal":—

"By villainy
I got this ring; 'twas Leonatus' jewel,
Whom thou didst banish; and (which more may grieve thee,
As it doth me) a nobler sir ne'er lived
'Twixt sky and ground."

By villainy? Yet how? As yet Imogen is without a clue. But Iachimo's next words, in answer to Cymbeline's demand for further explanation, must have sent all the blood back to her heart:—

"That paragon, thy daughter,
For whom my heart drops blood, and my false spirits
Quail to remember— Give me leave, I faint!"

How dear a place that daughter really held in Cymbeline's heart, we see from his exclamation:—

"My daughter! What of her? Renew thy strength:
I had rather thou shouldst live while nature will,
Than die ere I hear more. Strive, man, and speak!"

On this, Iachimo proceeds to recount the incidents of the wager, and of his visit to the Court of Britain, together with the details noted down in Imogen's chamber, that composed the "simular proof" which made "the noble Leonatus mad."

Imagine Imogen's state of mind during the recital! Oh the shame, the agony with which she hears that her "dear lord" has indeed had cause to think her false! All is now clear as day. The mystery is solved; but too late, too late! She remembers the supposed treasure in the chest, although Iachimo does not speak of it. Then the lost bracelet! How dull she has been not to think before of the way it might have been stolen from her! Worst misery of all, Posthumus has died in the belief of her guilt. No wonder he wished for her death! What bitter hopeless shame possesses her, even as though all were true that he had been told! Only in the great revealing of all mysteries

hereafter will Posthumus learn the truth. But till then she has to bear the burden of knowing with what bitter thoughts of her he passed out of life.

Ah, dear friend, as I write, the agony of all these thoughts seems again to fill my mind, as it ever used to do when acting this scene upon the stage. I wonder if I ever looked what I felt! It is in such passages as these that Shakespeare surpasses all dramatic writers. He has faith in his interpreters, and does not encumber them with words. None could express what then was passing in Imogen's soul. At such moments Emerson has truly said, we only "live from a great depth of being."

I cannot conceive what Imogen would have done eventually had Posthumus been indeed dead. But I can conceive the strange bewildered rapture with which she sees him spring forward to interrupt Iachimo's further speech. He is not dead. He has heard her vindication; and she, too, lives to hear his remorse, his self-reproaches, his bitter taunts upon his own credulity! From his own lips her vindication comes:—

"The temple
Of virtue was she; yea, and she herself.
Spit, and throw stones, cast mire upon me, set
The dogs o' the street to bay me! Every villain
Be call'd Posthumus Leonatus. . . . O Imogen!
My queen, my life, my wife! O Imogen!
Imogen, Imogen!"

Unable to bear his anguish longer, and forgetting her page's disguise, she springs forward to throw herself into his arms, with the words, "Peace, my lord; hear, hear!" But he will neither look nor hear, and casts the "scornful page"—who, he thinks, is trifling with his grief—with violence away from him. Pisanio, who, next to Posthumus and Imogen, has been the most interested and wondering hearer of Iachimo's story, says, as he stoops to raise Imogen from the ground:—

"Oh gentlemen, help!
Mine and your mistress! Oh, my lord Posthumus,
You ne'er kill'd Imogen till now. Help! help!—
Mine honour'd lady!"

When she returns to consciousness, Posthumus has scarce re-

covered from the bewilderment of his surprise to find Imogen alive, of whose death he had thought himself guilty. But with what pangs and yearnings of the heart must he have heard her sweet reproach!—

“Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?

Think that you are upon a rock, and now

Throw me again.

[*Embracing him.*

Post.

Hang there, like fruit, my soul,

Till the tree die!”

Imogen has meanwhile learned how innocent Pisanio was of all evil intention in regard to the drug which the queen had hoped would prove fatal to her, and how that intention had been frustrated by Cornelius giving to the queen, instead of a poison,

“Certain stuff, which, being ta'en, would cease

The present power of life, but in short time

All offices of nature should again

Do their due functions.”

The loyal servant, we may be sure, was more than requited for the suspicion that had for a time rested on him, by the kind looks and words with which Imogen would greet him. But a last sweet moment is yet to come for her, when she hears the story of Belarius, and learns that those from whom she had received such timely help and kindness are indeed, what she had then wished them to be, her brothers. When Cymbeline says to her, “Oh, Imogen, thou hast lost by this a kingdom,” how true to all her generous impulses is her rejoinder! A kingdom! What is so poor a thing as a kingdom in her account? “No, my lord; I have got *two worlds* by it!” And then, as when the heart is very full of happiness, we are afraid of giving way to great emotion, or of trusting ourselves to speak of the joy we feel, she seeks relief in reminding them half jestingly, as she places herself between them, of the past:—

“Oh, my gentle brothers,

Have we thus met? Oh, never say hereafter

But I am truest speaker. You call'd me brother,

When I was but your sister; I you brothers,

When ye were so indeed.

Cym.

Did you e'er meet

Arr. Ay, my good lord.

Gui. And at first meeting loved ;
Continued so, until we thought he died.

Cor. By the queen's dram she swallowed.

Cym. Oh, rare instinct !
When shall I hear all through ?”

When now Cymbeline hails Belarius as his brother, Imogen will not be behind in thankful recognition. She says—

“You are my father too, and did relieve me,
To see this gracious season.”

Nor is Lucius forgotten ; for when Cymbeline, in his exuberant happiness, bids his prisoners be joyful too, “for they shall taste our comfort,” Imogen, as she hangs upon the breast of Posthumus, turns smilingly to the noble Roman with the words, “My good master, I will yet do you service,” and helps to relieve him of his chains. They are the last she speaks ; and here I might well leave her, with the picture of her in our minds which Shakespeare has drawn for us in the words of her delighted father :—

“See,
Posthumus anchors upon Imogen ;
And she, like harmless lightning, throws her eye
On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting
Each object with a joy.”

Here, too, I believe, most people will prefer to leave her, as Shakespeare leaves her and all around her, both good and bad, happy : “Pardon's the word for all !” But you know how, in my letter on Portia, I said that I never could leave my characters when the scene closed in upon them, but always dreamed them over in my mind until their end. So it was with Imogen. Her sufferings are over. The “father cruel,” made so by the “step-dame false,” has returned to his old love and pride in her,—the love made doubly tender by remembrance of all that he has caused her to suffer. The husband—ah, what can measure his penitence, his self-abasement ! That *he* had dared to doubt her purity, her honour,—he who had known her inmost thoughts from childhood !

But Imogen—can she think of him as before ? Yes ! She

is truly named the "divine Imogen"; at least, she has so much of the divine "quality of mercy" in her, that she can blot from her memory all his doubts, all his want of faith, as if they had never been. Her love is infinite—"beyond beyond." Hers is not a nature to do things by halves. She has forgotten as well as forgiven. But can Posthumus forgive himself? No! I believe, never. The more angel she proves herself in her loving self-forgetfulness, the blacker his temporary delusion will look in his own eyes. Imogen may surmise at times the thorns which prick his conscience so sharply. Then she will quietly double the tender ways in which she delights to show her love and pride in him. But no spoken words will tell of this heart-secret between them.

In her brothers Imogen has none but sweet and happy memories. These "two worlds" are an immense and unlooked-for gain to her life; they fill it with new thoughts, new sympathies. She has their future to look forward to, their present to help. One can see how their unsophisticated natures will go forth to her; how the tender memory of the "rare boy" Fidele will give an added charm to the grace and attractiveness of the sweet sister-tie; how, in their quiet hours with her, they will repeat the incidents of the cave-life. Imogen will never tell them the whole of her sorrow there. She fears they would not forgive Posthumus. We can suppose, too, how, in this so new life to them, the young princes would be for ever seeking this sweet counsellor to guide them in the usages and customs of the Court life, all so strange to them. Men will ask from women what they would be shy of asking from one another. Think of the pleasant banterings there would be at times between them! How amused Imogen would be at their mistakes in the Court etiquette! How often, laughingly, she would have to put them right; and how all these things would draw them nearer to each other!

Then, too, the old soldier Belarius,—the tried retainer and friend Pisanio! What a group of loving hearts about the happy princess! Caius Lucius also, in Rome, carrying in his memory tender thoughts of his once "kind, duteous" page Fidele, together with the admiring respect he feels for the noble Imogen,

Princess of Britain. And Iachimo! The time is to come when his repentance will flow from a still deeper source. While at the Court of Britain, he could not fail to hear of all the misery which he had wrought upon the noble lovers. With his own ears he heard the despair of Posthumus on learning the truth—his agony, his self-accusations—at the thought that he had taken away the life of the maligned princess. But even bitterer pangs of remorse than he then felt will assail Iachimo and never leave him,—for we find he is capable of feeling them,—when he learns that, before very long, the young noble life is quenched through the suffering and bitter trials which his treachery had brought upon it. For quenched, I believe, it is.

Happiness hides for a time injuries which are past healing. The blow which was inflicted by the first sentence in that cruel letter went to the heart with a too fatal force. Then followed, on this crushing blow, the wandering, hopeless days and nights, without shelter, without food even up to the point of famine. Was this delicately nurtured creature one to go through her terrible ordeal unscathed? We see that when food and shelter came, they came too late. The heart-sickness was upon her: "I am sick still—heart-sick." Upon this follows the fearful sight of, as she supposes, her husband's headless body. Well may she say that she is "nothing; or if not, nothing to be were better." When happiness, even such as she had never known before, comes to her, it comes, like the food and shelter,—too late.

Tremblingly, gradually, and oh, how reluctantly! the hearts to whom that life is so precious will see the sweet smile which greets them grow fainter, will hear the loved voice grow feebler! The wise physician Cornelius will tax his utmost skill, but he will find the hurt too deep for mortal leech-craft to heal. The "piece of tender air" very gently, but very surely, will fade out like an exhalation of the dawn. Her loved ones will watch it with straining eyes, until it

"melts from
The smallness of a gnat to air; and then
Will turn their eyes and weep."

And when, as the years go by, their grief grows calm, that lovely soul will be to them

“like a star
Beaconing from the abodes where the Immortals are ;”

inspiring to worthy lives, and sustaining them with the hope that where she is, they may, in God's good time, become fit to be. Something of this the “divine Imogen” is to us also. Is it not so?

This was my vision of Imogen when I acted her; this is my vision of her still.—Ever, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

BRYNTYSILIO, LLANGOLLEN,
NORTH WALES, *Oct.* 1882.

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VII.

R O S A L I N D

[illegible][illegible]

VII.

R O S A L I N D.

BRYNTYSILIO, *September 1884.*

“But heavenly Rosalind!”

“That gaze
Kept, and shall keep me to the end her own!
She was above it—but so would not sink
My gaze to earth.”

—*Colombe's Birthday*, Act ii. sc. 1.

MY DEAR MR BROWNING,—

THE note in which you thanked me with so many kind words for sending you my letter upon Imogen, ended with the following suggestion, “And now you must give us Rosalind.” I would fain think you were moved to write these stimulating words by some not unpleasing remembrance of the way in which, to use Rosalind’s own phrase, “I set her before your eyes, human as she is,” in the days when our kindred studies,—yours as a dramatist, mine as an interpreter of the drama,—first drew us into the communion which has ripened into a lifelong friendship. For whom would I try with more alacrity to execute a task so difficult, yet so congenial, than for the poet whose Lucy Carlisle, whose Mildred Tresham, and, last not least, whose exquisite Colombe are associated with the earliest recollections of my artist life?

With what sweet regret I look back to the time when, with

other gifted men,—Talfourd, Bulwer, Marston, Troughton, and the rest,—you made common cause with Mr Macready in raising the drama of our time to a level not unworthy of the country of Shakespeare! How generously you all wrought towards this end! How warmly were your efforts seconded by the public! And yet I used the word “regret,” because of the sudden end which came to all our strivings, when Mr Macready threw up the enterprise just when it seemed surest of success. It was an evil hour for my own art, and not less evil, I venture to think, for the literature of the drama. But for this mischance, we might have looked to you for that fuller development of your dramatic genius, which I can well believe you did not care to put forth, when you were no longer sure of a combination of trained actors and actresses to understand, and to make others understand, the characters you had drawn. Grateful as I am for what you have given to the world in many ways, I have always felt how great a loss the stage has suffered from the diversion into other channels of that creative dramatic power which you, of all our contemporaries, seem to me pre-eminently to possess. You may remember saying at a casual meeting in Hyde Park, when I was expressing my love and admiration for *Pompilia*, —“Ah, if I could have had you for *Pompilia*, I would have made the story into a drama.” Your words made me very happy. How gladly would I have done my best to illustrate a character so finely conceived!

“And now you must give us *Rosalind*.” Your words lie before me as I take up your letter again, after a long interval of suffering, which, for nearly two years, has made writing, and even continuous thought, impossible. They are my encouragement to throw myself again into that world, so ideal yet so real, in which, with *Rosalind*, it was my delight to sojourn, and endeavour to put before you what was in my heart and my imagination when I essayed to clothe her with life. Ah me! what it will be to me to enter again into that delicious dream-land out of the life in death in which, for so long, I have been “doomed to go in company with pain”!

I need not tell you that, when you first saw my *Rosalind*, “I was too young that time to value her,” and could not enter

so fully into her rich complex nature as to do justice to it. This was no more possible than it would have been for Shakespeare to have written, before the maturity of manhood, a play so full of gentle wisdom, so catholic in its humanity, so subtle in the delineation, so abounding in nicely balanced contrasts, of character, so full of happy heart, so sweetly rounded into a harmonious close, as *As You Like It*. His mind had assuredly worked its way through the conflicts and perplexities of life, within as well as without, and had settled into harmony with itself, before this play was written.

In my first girlhood's studies of Shakespeare this play had no share. Pathos, heroism, trial, suffering—in these my imagination revelled, and my favourites were the heroines who were put most sorely to the proof. Juliet, Desdemona, Cordelia, Imogen, I had brooded over until they had become, as it were, part of my life; and, as you may remember, in the more modern plays, in which I performed the heroines, the pathetic or tragic element almost invariably predominated. When, therefore, I was told by Mr Macready that he wished me to act Rosalind for my benefit at the end of a season, I was terrified. I did not know the words, nor had I ever seen the play performed, but I had heard enough of what Mrs Jordan and others had done with the character, to add fresh alarm to my misgivings. Mr Macready, however, was not to be gainsaid; so I took up my Shakespeare, determined to make the best of what had to me then all the aspect of a difficult and somewhat irksome task. Of course I had not time to give to the entire play the study it requires, if Rosalind is to be rightly understood.

The night of trial came. Partly because the audience were indulgent to me in everything I did, partly, I suppose, because it was my benefit night, the performance was received with enthusiasm. I went home happy, and thinking how much less difficult my task had been than I had imagined. But there a rude awakening met me. I was told that I had been merely playing, not acting, not impersonating a great character. I had not, it seemed to my friends, made out what were generally considered the great points in the character. True, I had gained the applause of the audience, but this was to be deemed as

nothing. Taken in the mass, they were as ignorant as I was, perhaps more so, as probably, even in my hasty study, I had become better acquainted with the play than most of them. It was very necessary, I have no doubt, and wholesome for me, to receive this lesson. But oh, what a pained and wounded heart I took with me that night to my pillow! I had thought that upon the whole I had not been so very bad,—that I had been true at least to Shakespeare in my general conception, though, even as I acted, I felt I had not grasped anything like the full significance of the words I was uttering. Glimpses of the poet's purpose I had, no doubt, for I do not think I ever altered the main outlines of my first conception; but of the infinite development of which it is capable I had no idea. It was only when I came to study the character minutely, and to act it frequently, that its depths were revealed to me.

As I recall the incidents of this first performance, I am reminded how little the public knew of the disadvantages under which, in those days, one used sometimes to be called upon to play important parts. To an artist with a conscience, and a reputation to lose, this was a serious affair. In much the same hurried way I was originally required to act Lady Macbeth, and this before the Dublin audience, which, I had been told, was then in many respects more critical than that of London. After the close of the Drury Lane season, in June, I acted a short engagement in Dublin with Mr Macready. Macbeth was one of his favourite parts, and to oblige the manager, Mr Calcraft, I had promised to attempt Lady Macbeth; but in the busy work of each day, up to the close of the London season, I had had no time to give the character any real thought or preparation. Indeed the alarm I felt at the idea of presuming to go upon the stage in such a character, made me put off grappling with it to the last possible moment. The mere learning of the words took no time. Shakespeare's words seem to fasten, without an effort, upon the mind, and to live there for ever. Mr Macready at our one rehearsal taught me the business of the scene, and I confided to him the absolute terror I was in as the time of performance drew near. He kindly encouraged me, and said, from what he had seen during the rehearsal, he was sure I should get on very

well. At night, when it was all over, he sent to my dressing-room to invite me to take the call of the audience along with him. But by this time the poor frightened "Lady" had changed her sleep-walking dress with the extremest haste, and driven away home. I was rather scolded the next day by Mr Macready, who reminded me that he had asked me to remain, feeling assured the audience would wish to see me. This I had quite forgotten, thinking only of the joy of having got over my fearful task, and desirous of running away and forgetting it as quickly as possible.

I have no remembrance of what the critics said. But Mr Macready told me that my banquet and sleep-walking scenes were the best. In the latter, he said, I gave the idea of sleep, disturbed by fearful dreams, but still it was sleep. It was to be seen even in my walk, which was heavy and unelastic, marking the distinction—too often overlooked—between the muffled voice and seeming-mechanical motion of the somnambulist, and the wandering mind and quick fitful gestures of a maniac, whose very violence would wake her from the deepest sleep,—a criticism I never forgot, always endeavouring afterwards to work upon the same principle, which had come to me then by instinct. Another remark of his about the sleep-walking scene I remember. He said: "Oh, my child, where did you get that long-drawn sigh? What can you know of such misery as that sigh speaks of?" He also said that my first scene was very promising, especially the soliloquy, also my reception of Duncan, but that my after scenes with him were very tame. I had altogether failed in "chastising with the valour of my tongue."

The only criticism I remember on this my first attempt in Dublin, besides Mr Macready's, was that of a most highly cultivated and dear lady friend, who said to me a day or two afterwards: "My dear, I will never see you again in that terrible character. I felt horror-stricken. Lear says of Cordelia, 'So young and so untrue!' I should say of your Lady Macbeth, 'So young and yet so wicked!'"

Her antipathy was equalled by my own. To the last time of my performing the character I retained my dread of it, and to such a degree, that when I was obliged to act it in the course of my engagements (as others did not seem to dislike seeing me

in the character so much as I disliked acting it), I invariably took this play first, so as not to have it hanging over my head, and thus cleared my mind for my greater favourites. Not that, in the end, I disliked the character as a whole. I had no misgivings after reaching the third act, but the first two always filled me with a shrinking horror. I could not but admire the stern grandeur of the indomitable will which could unite itself with "fate and metaphysical aid" to place the crown upon her husband's brow. Something, it seemed to me, was also to be said in extenuation of the eagerness with which Lady Macbeth falls into his design, and urges him on to catch that crown "the nearest way." If we throw our minds into the circumstances of the time, we can understand the wife who would adventure so much for so great a prize, though we may not sympathise with her. Deeds of violence were common; succession in the direct line was often disturbed by the doctrine that "might was right"; the moral sense was not over-nice, when a great stake was to be played for. Retribution might come, or it might not; the triumph for the moment was everything, and what we should call, and rightly call, murder, often passed in common estimation for an act of valour. Lady Macbeth had been brought up amid such scenes, and one murder more seemed little to her. But she did not know what it was to be personally implicated in murder, nor foresee the Nemesis that would pursue her waking, and fill her dreams with visions of the old man's blood slowly trickling down before her eyes. Think, too, of her agony of anxiety, on the early morning just after the murder, lest her husband in his wild ravings should betray himself; and of the torture she endured while, no less to her amazement than her horror, he recites to Malcolm and Donalbain, with fearful minuteness of detail, how he found Duncan lying gashed and gory in his chamber! She had faced that sight without blenching, when it was essential to replace the daggers, and even to "smear the sleepy grooms with blood"; but to have the whole scene thus vividly brought again before her was too great a strain upon her nerves. No wonder that she faints. It was not Macbeth alone, as we soon see, whose sleep was haunted by the affliction of terrible dreams. She says nothing of them, for hers was the braver,

more self-sustained nature of the two ; but I always felt an involuntary shudder creep over me when, in the scene before the banquet scene, he mentions them as afflicting himself. He has no thought of what she, too, is suffering ; but that a change has come over her by this time is very clearly indicated by her words at the beginning of the same scene (Act iii. sc. 2) :—

“ Nought’s had, all’s spent,
Where our desire is got without content :
’Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy,”—

words which must never be lost sight of, pointing, as they do, to the beginning of that mental unrest brought on by the recurrence of images and thoughts which will not “ die with them they think on,” and which culminates in the “ slumbery agitation ” of the troubled nights that were quickly followed by her death, of which, in the sleep-walking scene, we have a glimpse.¹

I acted Lady Macbeth, for the second time, during Mr Macready’s management at Drury Lane ; it was then also upon an emergency, caused by the sudden illness of Mrs Warner, the Lady Macbeth of the theatre. Not long afterwards I had to take this character, among others selected for a series of performances in Paris. This and Ophelia and Virginia I had consented to play, to oblige Mr Mitchell of Bond Street, whose enterprise it was, upon the understanding that I was to act in other plays more identified with my name, which I selected. When I made my engagement with Mr Mitchell, Mr Macready was in America. On his return my plays were put aside by him, and others of his own substituted. Mr Mitchell came to me in great distress, and represented that, did I not feel for him, and give in to his necessity, the whole scheme would collapse, and all his labour and his expense would be thrown away.

Juliet I had only the opportunity of acting once, and that was on the last night of the twelve performances. *Romeo and Juliet* had been, with other plays, cut out of the list by Mr Macready ; but Mr Mitchell took it for his benefit, telling me that I should at least have the chance of acting one character

¹ See Appendix, p. 400.

of my own selecting. That was a happy night to me, for the audience went with me enthusiastically throughout the performance. The success, indeed, was so great, that Mr Mitchell was most anxious I should renew my engagement without Mr Macready; but he could not get the use of the theatre for a longer period. I was told at the time that his disappointment was attributable to the intervention of the Parisian actors, who appealed to the authorities to prevent the prolongation of the English performances—a piece of jealousy so unworthy, that I found it hard to believe it.¹

Upon the whole, as things turned out, I had no great reason to regret having yielded to Mr Mitchell's necessities. It was a delight to play to audiences so refined and sympathetic, and to learn, from the criticisms of such men as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Edouard Thierry, and Jules Janin, that I had carried them along with me in my treatment of characters so varied. I remember well how strange they seemed to think it, that the same actress should play Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona, and Lady Macbeth—impressing each, as they were indulgent enough to say, with characteristics so distinct and so marked, as to make them forget the actress in the woman she represented.

In what they said and wrote I had some compensation for the chagrin I naturally felt at being deprived by Mr Macready of the opportunity of personating before a Parisian audience the characters which were considered more peculiarly my own. Mr Macready was a great actor, and a distinguished man in many ways; but you will, I daresay, remember that he would never, if he could help it, allow any one to stand upon the same level with himself. I read once in *Punch*, that they supposed Mr Macready thought Miss Helen Faucit had a very handsome back, for, when on the stage with her, he always managed that the audience should see it and little else. But I must say that I was never so conscious of this unfairness with him, as with his, in my opinion, very inadequate successor Mr Phelps, who always took his stand about two feet behind you, so that no face should be seen, and no voice be distinctly heard, by the audience, but his own. I remember finding this particularly unpleasant on the

¹ See Appendix, p. 404.

night I played Lady Macbeth at the first performance given in honour of the Princess Royal's marriage. These performances took place at Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket, soon afterwards burned down. The stage was the largest in London, and fully one-third of it was occupied by the proscenium. I was then, as was my choice after my marriage, acting very rarely, and at long intervals. From want of continuous practice, therefore, I was not so sure of the penetrating power of my voice, especially in a theatre of such unusual size. At one of the rehearsals, kind Sir Julius Benedict warned me against speaking further back than the proscenium. He said no voice, however powerful, could be heard behind it, and that the singers invariably planted themselves well in front. I mentioned this to Mr Phelps, who was the Macbeth, and he seemed to agree to act upon the suggestion. But at night, from his first entry to Lady Macbeth, he took up a position far behind me, and kept it, wherever possible, throughout all my scenes with him. In my subsequent experience with him, I found this to be his invariable practice. Tricks of this sort are as foolish as they are ungenerous, and could never enter the minds of those who desire to be truly artists. When actors have told me, as they often have, that I was always so fair to act with, I could only express my surprise; for how can you hope to represent characters faithfully unless mind is acting upon mind and face meeting face, so that the words flow naturally in answer to the thoughts you see depicted there?

Forgive these details, which have thrust themselves in by the way, and return with me to *As You Like It*. When I resolved to make a thorough study of the play, I little thought how long, yet how fascinating, a task I had imposed upon myself. With every fresh perusal new points of interest and new charms revealed themselves to me; while, as for Rosalind, "she drew me on to love her" with a warmth of feeling which can only be understood by the artist who has found in the heroine she impersonates that "something never to be wholly known," those suggestions of high qualities answerable to all the contingencies or trials of circumstance by which we are captivated in real life, and which it is her aim and her triumph to bring home to the hearts and imaginations of her audience as they have come home

to her own. Often as I have played Rosalind since, I have never done so without giving fresh thought to the character, nor without finding in it something that had escaped me before. It was ever, therefore, a fresh delight to bring out as best I could in action what had thus flashed upon me in my hours of meditation, and to try to make this exquisite creature as dear and fascinating to my audience as she had become to myself. In the very acting I learned much; for if on the stage you leave your mind open to what is going on around you, even an unskilful actor by your side—and I need not say how much more a gifted one—may, by a gesture or an intonation, open up something fresh to your imagination. So it was I came to love Rosalind with my whole heart; and well did she repay me, for I have often thought, “and have been told so of many,” that in impersonating her I was able to give full expression to what was best in myself as well as in my art.

It was surely a strange perversion which, we read, assigned Rosalind, as at one time it had assigned Portia, to actresses whose strength lay only in comedy. Even the joyous, buoyant side of her nature could hardly have justice done to it in their hands; for that is so inextricably mingled with deep womanly tenderness, with an active intellect disciplined by fine culture, as well as tempered by a certain native distinction, that a mere comedian could not give the true tone and colouring even to her playfulness and her wit. Those forest scenes between Orlando and herself are not, as a comedy actress would be apt to make them, merely pleasant fooling. At the core of all that Rosalind says and does, lies a passionate love as pure and all-absorbing as ever swayed a woman's heart. Surely it was the finest and boldest of all devices, one on which only a Shakespeare could have ventured, to put his heroine into such a position that she could, without revealing her own secret, probe the heart of her lover to the very core, and thus assure herself that the love which possessed her being was as completely the master of his. Neither could any but Shakespeare have so carried out this daring design, that the woman thus rarely placed for gratifying the impulses of her own heart, and testing the sincerity of her lover's, should come triumphantly out of the ordeal, charming us, during the

time of probation, by her wit, her fancy, by her pretty womanly waywardnesses playing like summer lightning over her throbbing tenderness of heart, and never in the gayest sallies of her happiest moods losing one grain of our respect. No one can study this play without seeing that, through the guise of the brilliant-witted boy, Shakespeare meant the charm of the high-hearted woman, strong, tender, delicate, to make itself felt. Hence it is that Orlando finds the spell which "heavenly Rosalind" had thrown around him, drawn hourly closer and closer, he knows not how, while at the same time he has himself been winning his way more and more into his mistress's heart. Thus, when at last Rosalind doffs her doublet and hose, and appears arrayed for her bridal, there seems nothing strange or unmeet in this somewhat sudden consummation of what has been in truth a lengthened wooing. The actress will, in my opinion, fail signally in her task, who shall not suggest all this, who shall not leave upon her audience the impression that, when Rosalind resumes her state at her father's court, she will bring into it as much grace and dignity, as by her bright spirits she had brought of sunshine and cheerfulness into the shades of the forest of Arden.

To me, *As You Like It* seems to be essentially as much a love-poem as *Romeo and Juliet*, with this difference—that it deals with happy love, while the Veronese story deals with love crossed by misadventure and crowned with death. It is as full of imagination, of the glad rapture of the tender passion, of its impulsiveness, its generosity, its pathos. No "hearse-like airs," indeed, come wailing by, as in the tale of those "star-crossed lovers," to warn us of their too early tragic "overthrow." All is blended into a rich harmonious music, which makes the heart throb, but never makes it ache. Still the love is not less deep, less capable of proving itself strong as death; neither are the natures of Orlando and Rosalind less touched to all the fine issues of that passion than those of "Juliet and her Romeo."

Is not love, indeed, the pivot on which the action of the play turns—love, too, at first sight? Does it not seem that the text the poet meant to illustrate was that which he puts into Phebe's mouth—

“Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might,—
 ‘Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?’”

And this, too, the Phebe who but a few minutes before had smiled with scorn at her suitor's warning—

“If ever (as that ever may be near),
 You meet in some fresh cheek the power of fancy,
 Then shall you know the wounds invisible
 That love's keen arrows make.”

Love at first sight, like that of Juliet and Romeo, is the love of Rosalind and Orlando, of Celia and Oliver, and of Phebe herself for Ganymede. The two latter pairs of lovers are perhaps but of little account; but is not the might of Marlowe's saw as fully exemplified in Rosalind and Orlando as in the lovers of Verona?

Happily for them, and for us, there were no ancestral feuds, no unsympathetic parents to step in and place a bar upon their affections. Whether or not Shakespeare believed his own words (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act i. sc. 1)—“The course of true love never did run smooth,” who may tell? I venture to think he no more held this creed than he did many of what are called his opinions, which, although most apt in the mouths of his characters, were never meant to be taken as universally true. What, for example, can be more absurd than the too common habit of quoting, as if it expressed Shakespeare's personal conviction, the phrase, “What's in a name?” No man, we may be sure, better understood how *very much* there may be in a name. As Juliet uses it, the phrase is apt and true. In the rapture of her love it was nothing to her that Romeo bore the name of the enemy of her house. What were ancestral feuds to her, who saw in him “the god of her idolatry”? “His gracious self” was her all in all. What, then, was in his name? But the phrase is not only meaningless, but false, when cited, as it too often is, without regard to person, place, or circumstance. In any case, Shakespeare has given us in this play a supreme instance in disproof of Lysander's sad axiom. The love in it does run smooth all through, with no more check or difficulty than serves to prove how genuine it is, and to bring two “true minds” into that perfect unison which is the only right prelude to

marriage. Circumstances, sad enough in themselves, have left both the lovers untrammelled by the ties of kindred. Orlando's father is dead. His elder brother defrauds him of his fortune, stints him of the training due to his rank, and hates him. Rosalind's father has been deposed from his dukedom while she was yet in early girlhood, and she has not seen him for years. She owes no allegiance to her uncle, at whose court she has been detained. The wills of both lovers are thus entirely free, and, by the time that each has found out what is in the other's heart, the turn of events makes everything smooth for their marriage, after the intermediate period of probation, which is in itself happiness as nearly perfect as heart could desire.

With what skill does Shakespeare at the outset of the play engage our interest for Orlando! In vain his elder brother has tried to crush in him, by neglect, and by "keeping him rustically at home" without the liberal culture of a gentleman, the inherent nobility of his nature. His father had left him "but a poor thousand crowns." Good old Sir Rowland was no doubt fettered by the usage that makes eldest sons rich at the cost of the younger; but he had charged Oliver "on his blessing" to breed Orlando well, feeling confident that this training only was wanted to enable him to carve out fortune for himself. How had Oliver obeyed the charge? "You have trained me," Orlando tells him, "like a peasant, obscuring and hiding from me all gentlemanlike qualities." But as he has grown into manhood, this state of things has become intolerable:—

"The spirit of my father grows strong in me, and I will no longer endure it: therefore, allow me such exercises as may become a gentleman, or give me the poor allottery my father left me by testament; with that I will go buy my fortunes."

Why did Oliver treat him thus? Why was it that, as he says, "he hates nothing more than he, and yet he knows not why"? Was it that Orlando had been his father's favourite, as indeed he seems to have inherited the virtues of that good man? "O my sweet master!" says old Adam (Act ii. sc. 3)—

"O you memory

Of old Sir Rowland!

Why are you virtuous? Why do people love you?
And wherefore are you gentle, strong, and valiant?
. . . Your virtues, gentle master,
Are sanctified and holy traitors to you."

No lack of "inland nurture" was able to spoil a nature so manly, in which the best instincts of "race" were paramount. We picture him handsome, courteous, modest, gallant, with the fresh cheek and the frank cordial eyes that speak of health, of active habits, and a genial nature such as wins men's hearts. Even Oliver is forced to admit that his efforts to spoil him have completely failed. "He's gentle; never schooled, and yet learned; full of noble device; of all sorts enchantingly beloved; and, indeed, so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised."

But of what avail is all this? Orlando has no career before him; all his powers are lying unused. He is in the saddest of all plights—that of a poor gentleman, full of noble aspirations, and without a chance of proving that he is not of the common herd. What wonder, then, that we see him dejected and out of heart, or that his words should vibrate with feeling, when he entreats Celia and Rosalind to forgive him for not yielding to their entreaty that he will not risk his life by wrestling with Charles, "the bony prizer of the humorous Duke"?—

"I beseech you, punish me not with your hard thoughts; wherein I confess me much guilty, to deny so fair and excellent ladies anything. But let your fair eyes and gentle wishes go with me to my trial: wherein if I be foiled, there is but one shamed that was never gracious; if killed, but one dead that is willing to be so! I shall do my friends no wrong, for I have none to lament me; the world no injury, for in it I have nothing; only in the world I fill up a place, which may be better supplied when I have made it empty."

Such words in the mouth of one so young, so obviously at all points a gentleman, could not fail to touch a gentlewoman's heart; and in Rosalind's case they were all the more likely to do so, because in her own fortunes and her own mood at the time there was much to beget in her a sympathetic feeling. The world had not gone well with her, either. When her father was

deposed she was yet a child, little likely, perhaps, to appreciate the change from a princess of the reigning to a princess of the dethroned house. She and her cousin Celia, the daughter of the man who dispossessed her father of his throne, had been "ever from their cradles bred together," and her superior charm and force of character had so won upon the affections of her cousin, that, as Shakespeare is at pains to tell us, through the mouth of Charles the Wrestler (Act i. sc. 1), when Rosalind's father was banished—"Celia would have followed her exile, or have died to stay behind her." The usurping Duke, whose only child Celia was, would not let Rosalind go into banishment with her father, for fear of the effect upon his daughter. "We stay'd her," as he says to Celia, "for your sake; else had she with her father ranged along." But the beauty and gentle bearing of Rosalind, as the years went on, made her dear to the people, who had probably found out by this time that they had made a bad exchange in the "humorous Duke" for the amiable and accomplished ruler whom he had supplanted,—just as the retainers of Oliver had found that not in him, but in his youngest brother, "the memory of old Sir Rowland" was perpetuated. Celia's father holding his place by an uncertain tenure, and therefore jealous of one who must be ever painfully reminding him of his usurpation, did not fail to observe this feeling among his subjects. It was dangerous to let it grow to a head; and so we see that, before the play opens, the thought had been present to his mind that Rosalind must stay no longer at his court. As he tells his daughter—

"Her very silence, and her patience,
Speak to the people, and they pity her."

To a mind like his, full of misgiving as to his own position, the observation of this fact must have been an hourly torment. But the old difficulty, the affection between Rosalind and his child, was by this time increased rather than diminished. "Never two ladies loved as they do," says Charles; "Their loves," says Le Beau, "are dearer than the natural love of sisters,"—both speaking the common voice of the people. And how united were their lives, we learn from Celia herself—

“ We still have slept together,
 Rose at an instant, learn'd, play'd, ate together ;
 And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
 Still we went coupled and inseparable.”

But her father's feeling of distrust had of late been growing into one of antipathy. Le Beau, a shrewd observer in spite of all his courtierly manner, and with a good heart, which the selfish habits of a court life have not wholly spoiled, sees pretty clearly the fate that is hanging over Rosalind :—

“ Of late this duke
 Hath ta'en displeasure 'gainst his gentle niece,
 Grounded upon no other argument
 But that the people praise her for her virtues,
 And pity her for her good father's sake ;
 And, on my life, his malice 'gainst the lady
 Will suddenly break forth.”

What the courtly Le Beau had so plainly seen to be the state of the Duke's mind was not likely to have escaped Rosalind's quick sensitive nature. She feels the cloud of her uncle's displeasure hanging over her, and ready to burst at any moment. She will not pain Celia with her forebodings, who is so far from surmising the truth, that the first lines she speaks are a gentle reproach to Rosalind for her want of gaiety ; to which Rosalind replies, “ I show more mirth than I am mistress of ; and would you yet I were merrier ? ” Then, throwing the blame of her present trouble upon an old sorrow, she adds : “ Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure.” From Celia's reply, it is obvious she has no idea that Rosalind has fallen out of favour with the usurping Duke. “ If my uncle, thy banished father, had banished thy uncle, the Duke my father, so thou hadst been still with me, I could have taught my love to take thy father for mine.” Too well Rosalind knows that the obstacle to this pretty proposal lies not with herself, but with Celia's father. Still she will hide from Celia the trouble she sees looming for herself in the not far distance. She will not show her “ the darks undream'd of ” into which their pleasant sisterly life is running. Why “ forestall her date of grief ” ? Why throw a shade over

her cousin's happy spirit, or refuse anything to one so generous in her assurance, that she will atone for the wrong done by her father to Rosalind, given in such words as these?—

“You know my father hath no child but I, nor none is like to have : and, truly, when he dies, thou shalt be his heir ; for what he hath taken away from thy father perforce, I will render thee again in affection ; by mine honour I will ; and when I break that oath, let me turn monster : therefore, my sweet Rose, my dear Rose, be merry.”

A sad smile breaks over Rosalind's face as she replies,—“From henceforth I will, coz, and devise sports.” “Let me see,” she adds,—little dreaming how near was the reality,—“what think you of falling in love?” To which Celia rejoins,—“Marry, pr'y-thee, do, to make sport withal : but love no man in good earnest ; nor no farther in sport neither, than with safety of a pure blush thou mayst in honour come off again.” And so these loving cousins prattle on brightly upon the lawn before the ducal palace, where presently an incident occurs which is to change the current of their lives. They have just heard from Le Beau of the murderous triumphs of the wrestler Charles, and would fain have escaped from seeing a repetition of his “rib-breaking.” But before they can get away, the Duke arrives with his suite upon the ground to see the contest to which Orlando has challenged Charles, with a determination, very clearly shown, to lower the tone of that professional braggart, if skill and good heart can do it.

At once the attention of the ladies is riveted by Orlando's appearance. “Is yonder the man?” are the words that break from Rosalind. “Alas,” exclaims her cousin, “he is too young ! yet he looks successfully.” The Duke, judging from his looks that the odds are all against the young fellow, tells the ladies they will take little delight in the wrestling, and urges them to try to dissuade him from persevering in his challenge. Celia, as the reigning Duke's daughter, and also because she is probably not so much moved as her cousin, does most of the talking ; but not a word, either of her entreaties or of Orlando's refusal, escapes Rosalind. She could not but respect a resolution so manly, yet so modestly expressed, however she may fear the issue. Or-

lando's heart must have leapt within him when she says, "The little strength that I have, I would it were with you. Fare you well. Pray heaven, I be deceived in you!" Deceived she shall be, he is determined, for her words have given to his sinews the strength of steel.

No thought now of leaving the ground. The ladies will see the fate of the young hero, and "rain influence" on him with their bright eyes. The wrestling begins—

Ros. O excellent young man!

Cel. If I had a thunderbolt in mine eye, I can tell who should down."

Charles is thrown by Orlando, and carried off insensible. And now they are to learn who the young hero is. In answer to the Duke, he tells his name, adding that he is the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Bois. Here is the link between Rosalind and Orlando. Sir Rowland has been loyal to the banished Duke—a sin the usurper cannot pardon in the son.

"The world esteemed thy father honourable,
But I did find him still mine enemy.
. . . Thou art a gallant youth:
I would thou hadst told me of another father."

Celia's heart revolts at this injustice. Turning to Rosalind, she says—

"Were I my father, coz, would I do this?"

And what says Rosalind?—

"My father loved Sir Rowland as his soul,
And all the world was of my father's mind:
Had I before known this young man his son,
I should have given him tears unto entreaties,
Ere he should thus have ventured."

She needs not the prompting of her cousin to "go thank him and encourage him"; but while Celia finds ready words, Rosalind's deeper emotion suggests to her a stronger token of the admiration he has roused. She has taken a chain from her neck, and stealthily kissing it—at least I always used to do so—she gives it to Orlando, saying:—

“Gentleman,
Wear this for me, one out of suits with fortune,
That could give more, but that her hand lacks means.”

Here she pauses, naturally expecting some acknowledgment from Orlando ; but finding none come, and not knowing how to break off an interview which has kindled a strange emotion within her, she adds, “Shall we go, coz?” Celia, heart-whole as she is, has no such difficulty. “Ay. Fare you well, fair gentleman,” she says, and turns away. Rosalind is going with her. Meanwhile Orlando, overcome by a new feeling, finds himself spell-bound.

“*Orl.* Can I not say I thank you? My better parts
Are all thrown down ; and that which here stands up
Is but a quintain, a mere lifeless block.”

It cannot be that he should let them go thus without a word of thanks ! Rosalind at least will not think so. What he mutters faintly to himself must surely have been meant for them.

“*Ros.* He calls us back : my pride fell with my fortunes ;
I’ll ask him what he would.—Did you call, sir?”

But his heart is too full, his tongue too heavily weighted by passion, to find vent in words. His action is constrained. He bows but makes no answering sign, and with trembling lips she continues :—

“Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown
More than your enemies.”

This “more than your enemies” is very significant, and speaks plainly enough, though spoken as it would be with great reserve of manner, of the favourable impression which the young wrestler has made upon her. We may be sure that, but for his modest demeanour, Rosalind would not have allowed herself to confess so much.

Celia amused, and disposed to rally her cousin about what looks to her rather more than “falling in love in sport,” accosts Rosalind mockingly in the phrase she has used but a few moments before, “Will you go, coz?” “Have with you,” Rosalind rejoins, quite understanding the roguish sparkle in her cousin’s

eyes, but not deterred by it from giving to Orlando as she goes an earnest "Fare you well!" But she is still slow to leave, hoping and longing for some words from his lips addressed to herself. When Celia takes her hand and is leading her away, Celia bows slightly to Orlando; but Rosalind in a royal and gentle manner curtsies to him, wishing to show her respect for the memory of his father, the dear friend of her father, and also her sympathy with his fortunes. These she can give him, if nothing else.

This scene, you will agree, needs most delicate touching in the actress. Rosalind has not much to say, but she has to make her audience feel by subtle indications the revolution that is going on in her heart from the moment her eyes fall upon her future lover, down to the parting glance with which her lingering farewell is accompanied. It is Juliet in the ball-room, but under conditions that demand a far greater variety of expression. There is no avowal of love; but when she leaves the stage, the audience must have been made to feel that in her case, as in Juliet's, her heart has made its choice, and that a change has come over her akin to that which has come over Orlando. Only when she is gone can he find words to tell it.

"What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue?
I cannot speak to her, yet she urg'd conference.
O poor Orlando, thou art overthrown;
Or Charles, or something weaker, masters thee."

He is in this state of strange bewildered delight when Le Beau, whom I like very much, and who, I am sure, was a favourite with Rosalind, returns, and warns him not to linger near the court. The sympathy of the bystanders for the brave young fellow has alarmed the Duke, and Le Beau's keen eyes have seen signs that bode no good to Sir Rowland's son.

"Such is now the Duke's condition,"

he tells Orlando,

"That he misconstrues all that you have done;"

adding, with a nice sense that a certain reticence is becoming in himself as a member of the ducal court,—

"The Duke is humorous : what he is, indeed,
More suits you to conceive than me to speak of."

Orlando is in no mood to think much about his own safety. Besides, what is the court to him? The all-important thing in his eyes is to know which of the two gracious ladies "that here were at the wrestling" is daughter of the Duke? He has lived near the court, and must have often heard the names of the two princesses. When, therefore, Le Beau replies, "The shorter is his daughter," he knows that the name of the daughter of the banished Duke, who left her chain with him, is Rosalind. Only after he is satisfied of this does he bethink him of what danger may await him.

"Thus must I from the smoke into the smother ;
From tyrant duke unto a tyrant brother."

But come what may, one image, we see, will be ever present with him,—that of "heavenly Rosalind."

When soon after we see her with her cousin, it is no secret between them that the sweet poison of love is working no less strongly in her. She is surprised at herself, she tells us, because she finds herself unable to resist it. How charmingly is this brought before us!—

Cel. Why, cousin ; why, Rosalind ; Cupid have mercy !—Not a word ?
Ros. Not one to throw at a dog.

Cel. But is all this for your father ?

Ros. No ; some of it is for my father's child.

Cel. Come, come, wrestle with thy affections.

Ros. Oh, they take the part of a better wrestler than myself !

Cel. Oh, a good wish upon you ! . . . Is it possible, on such a sudden, you should fall into so strong a liking with old Sir Rowland's youngest son ?

Ros. The duke my father lov'd his father dearly.

Cel. Doth it therefore ensue that you should love his son dearly ? By this kind of chase, I should hate him, for my father hated his father dearly ; yet I hate not Orlando.

Ros. No, 'faith, hate him not, for my sake.

Cel. Why should I not ? Doth he not deserve well ?

Ros. Let me love him for that ; and do you love him because I do."

But now the storm bursts, of which Rosalind had lived for

some time in apprehension. The Duke enters, his "eyes full of anger," and his "rough and envious disposition" vents its long-pent-up jealousy upon her in the cruel words—

"Within these ten days, if that thou be'st found
So near our public court as twenty miles,
Thou diest for it."

At this sentence the spirit of the princess must have grown warm within her. She knows her uncle too well to think of remonstrance. But what has she done to justify or to provoke this sudden outburst of his wrath? Still she controls herself, and asks in a tone of entreaty—

"I do beseech your grace,
Let me the knowledge of my fault bear with me ;
If with myself I hold intelligence,
Or have acquaintance with mine own desires ;
If that I do not dream, or be not frantic
(As I do trust I am not), then, dear uncle,
Never so much as in a thought unborn
Did I offend your highness."

His reply, "Thus do all traitors," &c., rouses the royal blood within her ; gentleness gives place to righteous remonstrance :—

"Your mistrust cannot make me a traitor :
Tell me whereon the likelihood depends ?"

His reply—

"Thou art thy father's daughter ; there's enough"—

brings the instant answer, in which years of silent endurance find a voice. She can bear any reproach to herself, but her loyalty to her father gives pungency to her answer :—

"So was I when your highness took his dukedom ;
So was I when your highness banish'd him.
Treason is not inherited, my lord ;
Or, if we did derive it from our friends,
What's that to me ? My father was no traitor."

In speaking this I could never help laying a slight emphasis on the last words. For what but a traitor had the Duke himself been? The sarcasm strikes home ; but, recovering herself a little for Celia's sake, she adds more gently—

“Then, good my liege, mistake me not so much,
To think my poverty is treacherous.”

In vain Celia tries to shake her father's resolution, telling him that, when first he had kept back her cousin to be her companion—

“I was too young that time to value her ;
But now I know her : if she be a traitor,
Why so am I.”

Celia heeds not her father when he replies that she suffers in general estimation by the presence of Rosalind :—

“She robs thee of thy name ;
And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous
When she is gone !”

And when he renews his doom of banishment, she proves, by her reply, that the yearning of the child had become the fixed resolution of the woman :—

“Pronounce that sentence, then, on me, my liege ;
I cannot live out of her company.”

The angry tyrant, thinking these to be but idle words, and unable to conceive a friendship of this exalted strain, breaks away, saying—

“You are a fool. You, niece, provide yourself :
If you outstay the time, upon my honour,
And in the greatness of my word, you die.”

Then comes a passage, than which what prettier picture of more than sisterly devotion was ever painted ?—

“*Cel.* O my poor Rosalind ! whither wilt thou go ?
Wilt thou change fathers ? I will give thee mine.
I charge thee, be not thou more griev'd than I am.

Ros. I have more cause.

Cel. Thou hast not, cousin :
Pr'ythee, be cheerful. Know'st thou not, the Duke
Hath banish'd me, his daughter ?

Ros.

That he hath not

Cel. No ? hath not ? Rosalind lacks, then, the love
Which teacheth thee that thou and I am one.
Shall we be sunder'd ? Shall we part, sweet girl
No : let my father seek another heir.

Therefore devise with me how we may fly,
 Whither to go, and what to bear with us :
 And do not seek to take your change upon you,
 To bear your griefs yourself, and leave me out ;
 For, by this heaven, now at our sorrows pale,
 Say what thou canst, I'll go along with thee."

Rosalind, touched to the heart, and feeling that she also could not live without Celia, accepts the generous offer without remonstrance. It told that Celia's love, never very deep for such a father, had been so completely alienated by his injustice to her cousin, as well as by his late ungenerous treatment of Orlando, that to have remained behind, subject to his "rough and envious disposition," would have been misery. When Rosalind, half despondingly, says—

"Why, whither shall we go?"

her cousin's ready answer—

"To seek my uncle in the forest of Arden."

opens up, we may conceive, a delightful vision of freedom and independence. But then the danger to them—

"Maids as we are, to travel forth so far!"

Celia is ready with her plan:—

"I'll put myself in poor and mean attire,
 The like do you : so shall we pass along,
 And never stir assailants."

Rosalind was not likely to be behind her friend in courage. Besides, is not Celia sacrificing all for her, and has she not, therefore, a claim upon her for protection? So she betters Celia's suggestion:—

"Were it not better,
 Because that I am more than common tall,"

(How glad I always felt that in this respect, at least, I was akin to the poet's Rosalind!)

"That I did suit me all points like a man!"

Her fancy quickens at the thought, and with that fine buoyancy

of spirit, and play of graceful humour, of which we are anon to see so much, she goes on to complete the picture :—

“ A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
A boar-spear in my hand ; and (in my heart
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will)
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside ;
As many other mannish cowards have,
That do outface it with their semblances.”

Celia enters with delight into the idea :—

“ *Cel.* What shall I call thee, when thou art a man !
Ros. I'll have no worse a name than Jove's own page ;
And therefore look you call me Ganymede.
But what will you be call'd ? ”

Aliena, Celia says, shall be her name, as having “reference to her state” ; and now they have grown so happy at the thought of escaping from the trouble which seemed so terrible at first, that they can jest and play with the anticipation of the life before them. Touchstone, the court fool, shall be their companion—

“ He'll go along o'er the wide world with me ; ”

says Celia. He will be both a comfort and a protection ; and so with happy hearts they set about getting their “jewels and their wealth together” for the enterprise, which is to lead them

“ To liberty, and not to banishment.”

While things have thus come to an extremity with his “heavenly Rosalind,” a similar fate is overtaking Orlando. His brother, foiled in the hope that he would be killed by Charles, is determined to get rid of him by more desperate means. This Orlando learns from Adam, that ideal pattern of an old retainer, made doubly dear to us by the tradition that this was one of the characters which Shakespeare himself delighted to impersonate. You remember, doubtless, Coleridge's words, as reported by Mr Payne Collier : “Great dramatists make great actors. But, looking at Shakespeare merely as a performer, I am certain that he was greater as Adam in *As You Like It*, than Burbage as Hamlet or Richard the Third. Think

of the scene between him and Orlando, and think again that the actor of that part had to carry the author of it in his arms! Think of having had Shakespeare in one's arms! It is worth having died two hundred years ago to have heard Shakespeare deliver a single line. He must have been a great actor." I love to think so. Especially does my fancy gladly picture him in this scene, and find in doing so a richer music in the exquisite cadences of the lines in which the devotion and humble piety of that "good old man" are couched. Through his lips we learn how worthy in all ways to be loved is Orlando—a matter of first importance in one who is to be beloved by such a woman as Rosalind. The devotion of Celia to the heroine of the play also finds its counterpart in that of Adam to the hero—and the plot derives a fresh interest from the introduction of a character, not only charming in itself, but most skilfully used, both in this scene and the few others in which he appears, to heighten the favourable impression of Orlando's character created by his demeanour in the earlier scenes. The savings of Adam's life enable the old man and his young master to seek better fortunes elsewhere, in hopes to light "upon some settled low content." And so they, too, go forth, to reappear in that wondrous forest of Arden.

Of the little world there we are given a delightful glimpse, before either Celia and Rosalind, or Orlando and Adam, become its denizens. The second act opens in it, and shows us in Rosalind's father, the banished Duke, a character widely different from her own, with none of her vivacity or force, though with something of her sweetness of disposition. Like Prospero, a scholarly man, his retiring and unostentatious habits have, as in Prospero's case, given scope for an ambitious brother to rob him of his kingdom. Like Prospero, too, in this, "so dear the love his people bore him," they would not have endured any attempt upon his life, so that the worst his brother dared had been to banish him. To one who had,—again like Prospero,—"neglected worldly aids," dedicating the time, which ought more fitly to have been devoted to the duties of government, "to closeness, and the bettering of his mind," banishment has obviously been no great privation. Custom very soon has made

the rough forest life "more sweet than that of painted pomp." Adversity has given him clearer views of men, and taught him more of his own heart, than he could have ever learned in "the envious court." His calm, meditative mind discovers in the scenes around him delightful incidents, reminding him by contrast of the turmoil and perils of his former state. He

"Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything,"

and has in fact translated

"The stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style,"

that any regrets for his lost wealth and honours are to all appearance dead. Unlike Prospero, he shows no bitterness against his usurping brother, and has no yearnings for the power of which he has been despoiled. The easy dreamy life of the woods suits his languid temperament. He likes nothing better than an argument with Jaques, whose cynical views of life excite and amuse him, though he has no sympathy with them. Amiable, but weak, separation from his daughter does not seem to have cost him much regret. He believes she is happy where he has left her, in the position and with the surroundings that become her birth, and which, in his banishment, he could not give her. And she, on the other hand, is no doubt aware that her presence is by no means essential to his happiness. Thus she has no temptation to make herself known to him, when they meet casually in the forest, and when to have done so would have broken up the sweet masking intercourse with her lover, in which she was by that time involved.

When we first see Rosalind on the outskirts of the forest, wayworn and weary, we have scarce time to note how she tries to forget her own fatigue, and to comfort "the weaker vessel," her still more weary cousin, "as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat." Her thoughts, and ours, are soon carried off in another direction by the dialogue between the shepherd Corin and the young Silvius, in whose passion for

the shepherdess Phebe Rosalind finds the counterpart to her own haunting dreams about Orlando. Something of what these have been her words show: "Alas, poor shepherd! searching of thy wound, I have by hard adventure found mine own." In this train of thought Rosalind for the moment forgets weariness and hunger; but Celia, "faint almost to death," has to be thought for. Corin comes to their help, and puts them in the way of buying that cottage "by the tuft of olives" on the skirts of the forest, to which lovers of this play will always in their day-dreams find their way, leaving to the right "the rank of osiers, by the murmuring stream," that mingled its music with the songs of the birds and the rustling of the forest-leaves.

In this delightful retreat one loves to picture these two charming women in the full enjoyment of their new-born liberty, made more piquant by their little secret and by Rosalind's masquerading attire. For all her mannish dress and airs, there was, of course, something of a feminine character about the youth. "The boy is fair, of female favour," we are told later on, and, by contrast with Celia, "bestows himself like a ripe sister;" while Celia is "low, and browner than her brother." Again, Rosalind's picture is drawn for us by Phebe, and what a picture it is!—

"It is a pretty youth:—not very pretty:—
But, sure, he's proud; and yet his pride becomes him:
He'll make a proper man: the best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up.
He is not tall; yet for his years he's tall:
His leg is but so-so; and yet 'tis well:
There was a pretty redness in his lip;
A little riper and more lusty red
Than that mixed in his cheek; 'twas just the difference
Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask."

This is as she appeared to the rustic Phebe. Orlando, however, has seen something finer and nobler in his "heavenly" Rosalind during their brief meeting at the court. And naturally so, for she is then a lovely woman, and in a woman's flowing dress her height and carriage would make her look fairer and more majestic. So he ascribes to her

“Helen’s cheek, but not her heart ;
Cleopatra’s majesty ;
Atalanta’s better part ;
Sad Lucretia’s modesty.”

Add to this fine health, fine spirits, a vivid fancy, the courage of a pure heart and a frank generous nature, together with a voice rich, melodious, resonant, clear, that filled the air and left its tones lingering there, and the picture will be complete.

To a nature such as hers, the woodland life must have given exquisite pleasure. In her rambles a vision of the young Orlando would often mingle with her thoughts, and not unpleasantly. His forlorn position, so like her own, his bravery, his modesty, had made a deep impression on her, and yet this impression was one which she must have felt it would be foolish to cherish. They were now separated in such a way that their paths were not likely again to cross each other. Their worlds were different. Her heart’s fancy must therefore be put aside, forgotten. How long this inward struggle has been going on, Shakespeare does not tell us—it could not have been very long, for Orlando must have reached the glades of Arden soon after she did,—when roaming through the forest, she comes across a copy of verses hung (delightful defiance of local truth!) upon a palm-tree. Think of the throb at her heart, as she reads her own name running through every couplet! Still there are many Rosalinds in the world ; and how should he, of whom she has been dreaming, even know her name,—or how should he, of all men, be there in Arden? No, no, it must be mere coincidence ; and yet the pulse is quickened, the heart-throb felt. Presently she sees Celia coming through the wood, and she, too, is reading verses in praise of this unknown Rosalind. Although she has listened to every word with panting eagerness, Rosalind affects indifference, taxing Celia with inflicting upon her hearers “a tedious homily of love.” Before Celia answers, she sends Touchstone away, for she has just seen the author of this homily, and knows enough of her cousin’s heart to be sure that her tone will alter the moment she learns who it is, and may thus betray her secret to the sharp eyes of “the roynish fool.” Untouched by love herself, and so seeing only the humorous side of the passion,

Celia begins by tantalising Rosalind with the question, "Trow you who hath done this?" With the same air of affected indifference Rosalind replies, "Is it a man?" and at first thinks Celia is only teasing her, when she rejoins, "And a chain, that you once wore, about his neck?" The tell-tale blood now rushes to Rosalind's cheek, as she exclaims, "I pr'ythee, who?" It may be Orlando then after all, and yet how should it be? Is Celia merely mocking her? "Nay, I pray thee now, with most petitionary vehemence, tell me who it is." Celia, unconscious of the torture of suspense in which she is keeping her cousin, parries all her questions. At last, after what seems to Rosalind an age, she owns that "It is young Orlando, that tripp'd up the wrestler's heels, and your heart, both in an instant." Rosalind will not believe her, but thinks her still mocking. "Nay," she says, "speak sad brow, and true maid." When Celia replies, "I' faith, coz, 'tis he!" not even yet can such happiness be believed. Again the question must be asked—"Orlando?" The name we see by this had been often spoken between them. "Orlando!" Celia answers, and this time gravely, for Rosalind's emotion shows her this is no jesting matter.

Oh happiness beyond belief, oh rapture irrepressible! The tears at this point always welled up to my eyes, and my whole body trembled. If before Rosalind had any doubt as to the state of her own heart, from this moment the doubt must have ended. Overwhelmed as she is at the bare idea of Orlando's being near, the thought flashes upon her—"Alas the day! what shall I do with my doublet and hose?" but Celia has seen him—he perhaps has seen Celia—and that perplexing thought is put aside in her eagerness to learn full particulars about her lover.

"What did he, when thou saw'st him? What said he? How look'd he? Wherein went he? What makes he here? *Did he ask for me?* Where remains he? How parted he with thee? and when shalt thou see him again?"

These questions, all different, all equally to the purpose, huddled with breathless eagerness one upon another, yet each with different meaning and urged with varying intonation, must all—so ravenous is her curiosity—be answered "in one word." Well

may Celia reply that she must borrow for her Gargantua's mouth first, for "to say ay, and no, to these particulars, is more than to answer in a catechism." But Rosalind's questions are not even yet exhausted. She must learn whether Orlando knows that she is in the forest, and in man's apparel? And then comes, to sum up all, the sweet little womanly question, "Looks he as freshly as he did the day he wrestled?" After some further banter as to the general unreasonableness of lovers, Celia mentions that she saw him under a tree, where he lay "stretched along," evidently having no eyes for her or any one, "like a wounded knight. He was furnished like a hunter."

Ros. O ominous! he comes to kill my heart.

Cel. I would sing my song without a burden: thou bring'st me out of tune.

Ros. Do you not know I am a woman? when I think, I must speak. Sweet, say on."

At this moment Orlando is seen approaching with Jaques through the trees. A glance assures Rosalind that it is indeed he; but now the woman's natural shyness at being discovered in so strange a dress comes over her. "Slink by and note him," she says; and withdrawing along with Celia to a point where she may see and not be seen, she listens,—with what delight we may conceive,—to the colloquy in which her lover more than holds his own, when the misanthrope Jaques rallies him on being in love, and marring the forest-trees "with writing love-songs in their barks." On the assurance given by Orlando's answers that she is the very Rosalind of these songs, her heart leaps with delight. Not for the world would she have Orlando recognise her in her unmaidenly disguise; but now a sudden impulse determines her to risk all, and even to turn it to account as the means of testing his love. Boldness must be her friend, and to avert his suspicion, her only course is to put on a "swashing and a martial outside," and to speak to him "like a saucy lacquey, and under that habit play the knave with him." He must not be allowed for an instant to surmise the "hidden woman's fear" that lies in her heart. Besides, it is only by resort to a rough and saucy greeting and manner that she could mask and keep under the trembling of her voice, and the womanly tremor of

her limbs. I always give the "Do you hear, forester?" with a defiant air, as much as to say, What are you doing here, you, a stranger, intruding in the forest on those who are "natives of the place"? With such a swagger, too, that Orlando feels inclined, at first, to turn round sharply upon the boy, as he had just done upon the cynical Jaques. But despite this swagger, verging almost upon insolence, Orlando at once feels something that interests him in the "pretty youth," for as he afterwards tells her father—

"My lord, the first time that I ever saw him,
Methought he was a brother to your daughter."

Once fairly launched on her delicate venture, Rosalind does not give Orlando time to examine her appearance too closely, or to question himself wherein this attraction lies. She engages him in brilliant talk of a kind such as he had never before heard, but which his natural aptitude and shrewdness enable him thoroughly to appreciate.

How witty it all is, and how directly bearing upon the topic of his love, of which she wishes to bring him to speak more!

Ros. I pray you, what is't o'clock?

Orl. You should ask me what time o' day; there's no clock in the forest.

Ros. Then there is no true lover in the forest; else sighing every minute, and groaning every hour, would detect the lazy foot of Time as well as a clock.

Orl. And why not the swift foot of Time? Had not that been as proper?

Ros. By no means, sir. Time travels in divers paces with divers persons. I'll tell you who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal.

Orl. I pr'ythee, who doth he trot withal?

Ros. Marry, he trots hard with a young maid, between the contract of her marriage and the day it is solemnised. If the interim be but a se'n-night, Time's pace is so hard that it seems the length of seven years.

Orl. Who ambles Time withal?

Ros. With a priest that lacks Latin, and a rich man that hath not the gout; for the one sleeps easily because he cannot study and the other lives merrily because he feels no pain. . . . These Time ambles withal.

Orl. Who doth he gallop withal?

Ros. With a thief to the gallows; for though he go as softly as foot can fall, he finds himself too soon there.

Orl. Who stays it still withal?

Ros. With lawyers in the vacation; for they sleep between term and term, and then they perceive not how Time moves."

Strange that one who gives himself out as forest-born, "as the coney that you see dwell where she is kindled," should possess so much knowledge of the world, so much fluency and polish of expression. But when Orlando gives vent to his surprise, by telling Ganymede that his "accent is something finer" than was to be purchased in so "removed a dwelling," Rosalind, after scarcely an instant's pause, is ready with her answer: "I have been told so of many; but, indeed, an old religious uncle of mine taught me to speak." She cannot, however, keep off the theme that is uppermost in her heart, as it is in Orlando's, so she continues,—“one that knew courtship too well, for there he fell in love.” And then, to throw Orlando off the scent of her being otherwise than the boy she seems, she adds: "I have heard him read many lectures against it; and I thank Heaven I am not a woman to be touched with so many giddy offences as he hath generally taxed their whole sex withal." By this time Orlando's attention is thoroughly arrested. The note has been touched that is all music for him—Woman. For him at that moment there was but one in the world, and what "giddy offence" could be truly laid to her charge? He will learn, however, if he can, some of the "principal evils" imputed to her sex. When Rosalind replies with witty promptitude, "There were none principal; they were all like one another as half-pence are: every one fault seeming monstrous, till its fellow fault came to match it," he entreats her to recount some of them. What an opening here for her to put her lover to the test, to hear him say all that a woman most longs to hear from him she loves, while he is all the while ignorant that he is laying bare his heart before her!

"No," she rejoins, "I will not cast away my physic, but upon those that are sick. There is a man haunts the forest, that abuses our young plants with carving 'Rosalind' on their barks"—(she has just heard Jaques say he did so, but obviously says this merely upon his report),—"hangs odes upon hawthorns, and elegies on brambles: all, forsooth, deifying the name of Rosalind: if I could meet that fancy-monger, I would give him some good counsel, for he seems to have the quotidian of love upon him."

Poor Orlando, racked by what he believes to be a hopeless passion, would fain be helped to overcome the love-sickness

that consumes him. With what secret joy Rosalind hears his avowal! "I am he that is so love-shaked; I pray you, tell me your remedy." But she is determined he shall say as much again and again—for what words are so sweet to her ear?—and so she affects to disbelieve him, telling him he has none of her uncle's marks upon him,—the lean cheek, the blue eye and sunken, the beard neglected, the hose ungartered, the bonnet unbanded, the sleeve unbuttoned, the general air of "careless desolation," which are supposed to denote the man in love. "But you are no such man; you are rather point-device in your accoutrements; as loving yourself rather than seeming the lover of any other." His earnest protest, "Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love," only provokes the further teasing remark, "Me believe it! you may as soon make her that you love believe it;" and then, incapable of resisting the humour of the situation, she adds, "which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does: that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences." She sees that Orlando is rather dashed by this sarcastic remark, possibly pained, but she knows she holds the remedy for his pain in her own hands; and she puts him at his ease again by asking, with a softened voice—

"But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired.

Orl. I swear to thee, youth, by the white hand of Rosalind, I am that he, that unfortunate he.

Ros. But are you so much in love as your rhymes speak?

Orl. Neither rhyme nor reason can express how much."

Oh, how intently has she watched for that answer! with what secret rapture heard it! But he must discern nothing of this. So, turning carelessly away, and smiling inwardly to think that she is herself an illustration of what she says, she exclaims—

"Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too."

But now, coming back to the plan which has sprung up in her heart for riveting still closer Orlando's devotion, she adds—

"Yet I profess curing it by counsel.

Orl. Did you ever cure any so?

Ros. Yes, one, and in this manner. He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me: At which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing, and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles, for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour; would now like him, now loath him; then entertain him, then forswear him; . . . that I drave my suitor from his mad humour of love to a living humour of madness; which was,—to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic. And thus I cured him; and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep's heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in't."

In the range of Shakespearian comedy there is probably no passage that demands more subtle treatment in the actress than this. Rosalind's every faculty is quickened by delight, and this delight breaks out into a witty picture of all the wayward coquettishness that has ever been imputed to her sex. She rushes into this vein of humorous detraction, in order to keep up the show of curing Orlando of his passion by a picture of some of their "giddy offences." Note the aptness, the exquisite suggestiveness and variety of every epithet, which, woman as she is, she is irresistibly moved to illustrate and enforce by suitable changes of intonation and expression. But note also, so ready is her intelligence, that she does not forget to keep up the illusion about herself, by throwing in the phrase, that boys as well as women "are for the most part cattle of this colour." All the playfulness, the wit, the sarcasm bubble up, sparkle after sparkle, with bewildering rapidity. Can we wonder they should work a charm upon Orlando? What, he thinks, might a gifted creature like this not do? What if the boy were indeed able to accomplish what he has said he could? No, that would be to rob life of all that made life worth; so he replies, "I would not be cured, youth!" And yet there is a certain mysterious fascination which draws him on; and when this strangely imperious youth rejoins, with an air of unhesitating confidence, "I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind"—how she would linger on the name!—"and come every day to my cote, and woo me;" he can but answer—"Now, by the faith of my love, I will: tell

me where it is." She will show it to him at once, and by the way he shall "tell her where in the forest he lives." And when to her invitation, "Will you go?" he replies, "With all my heart, good youth," she begins the remedial lesson by telling him archly, with a playful smile that goes to his heart—"Nay, you must call me Rosalind." And turning to Celia, who must have seen with no small amazement the unexpected development of her cousin's character in this dialogue, calls to her to go home with them.

I need scarcely say how necessary it is for the actress in this scene, while carrying it through with a vivacity and dash that shall avert from Orlando's mind every suspicion of her sex, to preserve a refinement of tone and manner suitable to a woman of Rosalind's high station and cultured intellect; and by occasional tenderness of action and sweet persuasiveness of look to indicate how it is that, even at the outset, she establishes a hold upon Orlando's feelings, which in their future intercourse in the forest deepens, without his being sensibly conscious of it, his love for the Rosalind of his dreams. I never approached this scene without a sort of pleasing dread, so strongly did I feel the difficulty and the importance of striking the true note in it. Yet, when once engaged in the scene, I was borne along I knew not how. The situation, in its very strangeness, was so delightful to my imagination, that from the moment when I took the assurance from Orlando's words to Jaques, that his love was as absolute as woman could desire, I seemed to lose myself in a sense of exquisite enjoyment. A thrill passed through me; I felt my pulse beat quicker; my very feet seemed to dance under me. That Rosalind should forget her first woman's fears about her "doublet and hose" seemed the most natural thing in the world. Speak to Orlando she must at any hazard. But oh, the joy of getting him to pour out all his heart, without knowing that it was his "very Rosalind" to whom he talked,—of proving if he were indeed worthy of her love, and testing, at the same time, the depth and sincerity of her own devotion! The device to which she resorted seemed to suggest itself irresistibly; and, armed with Shakespeare's words, it was an intense pleasure to try to give expression to the archness, the wit, the quick

ready intellect, the ebullient fancy, with the tenderness underlying all, which gave to this scene its transcendent charm. Of all the scenes in this exquisite play, while this is the most wonderful, it is for the actress certainly the most difficult.

How mistaken, I think, is the opinion of those who maintain that Shakespeare was governed, in drawing his heroines, by the fact that they were acted by boys, and that this was one of his reasons for choosing stories in which they had to assume male attire! As if Imogen, Viola, and Rosalind were not "pure women" to the very core; as if, indeed, this were not the secret of the way in which they win the hearts of those whom they meet. Their disguise is never surmised, not even by their own sex, for Olivia falls passionately in love with Viola, and Phebe with Rosalind; and how markedly is Shakespeare's genius shown by the difference of the way this circumstance is handled in the case of each! Viola, gentle, self-sacrificing, generous, but with no spark of the heroic in her nature, sees the humorous absurdity of being wooed by a lady; but she is more perplexed than amused by it. She neither struggles against her own unrequited love, nor makes an effort to win requital for it. But, if placed in Viola's situation, Rosalind's mother-wit and high spirit would, I fancy, have enabled her to extricate herself handsomely. At all events, if, like Viola, she had fallen in love with the Duke Orsino, the attractions of Olivia which fascinated that dreamy personage would have grown daily fainter before the address, and vivacity, and bright intelligence of such a woman as Rosalind. By the time the discovery of her sex was made, his heart would have gone clean out of him, for he was capable of loving a noble woman nobly. How fine is his phrase, "Heaven walks on earth" (Act v. sc. 1), as he sees Olivia approaching! It would have been to his lips, and not to Viola's, that words laden with passion would have risen on discovering her sex,—he would have clasped her to his breast with irrepressible eagerness, instead of coldly giving her his hand, with the chilling request—

"Give me thy hand,
And let me see thee in thy woman's weeds."

Rosalind was not one to care for being loved in this stately

fashion, nor indeed for being taken up on any terms at second-hand. In her eyes, one of the chief attractions of Orlando was that his love was a first love, unsophisticated by any mixture of personal vanity or of selfish interest. His feeling, as he thinks of her, she sees, is the same as that of Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*—

“ ’Twere all one,
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, she is so above me.”

And this feeling is made more precious to Rosalind by her own consciousness of the complete conquest he has made of her own heart. Very woman as she is, she cannot help showing this in the next scene in which we see her. Orlando has not kept a promise to be with her that morning, and she is “in the very height of heart-heaviness” in consequence. In vain Celia tries to laugh her out of her depression. To Celia his absence is easily to be accounted for. She has learned he is in attendance on the banished Duke, and that, being so, he is not master of his own time. But not till she has teased Rosalind by maintaining that “there is no truth in him,” that she does not think he is in love, and, “besides, the oath of a lover is no stronger than the word of a tapster: they are both the confirmer of false reckonings,” does she suggest such an explanation. In this Rosalind manifestly finds some ease; she turns from the subject to tell Celia—

“ I met the Duke yesterday, and had much question with him. He asked me of what parentage I was; I told him, of as good as he; so he laughed, and let me go. But what talk we of fathers, when there is such a man as Orlando?”

What a world of passionate emotion is concentrated in that last sentence, and how important it is to bear this in mind in the subsequent scenes with Orlando!

At this point Rosalind's thoughts are turned into a new channel by the arrival of old Corin, who comes to tell them that “the shepherd that complained of love,” after whom they have often inquired, is now with “the proud disdainful shepherdess that was his mistress”; and that if they

“ Will see a pageant truly play’d,
Between the pale complexion of true love
And the red glow of scorn and proud disdain,”

he will take them to the place. Rosalind jumps at the suggestion, for

“ The sight of lovers feedeth those in love.
Bring us to this sight, and you shall say,
I’ll prove a busy actor in their play.”

Herself loving deeply, and prizing a good man’s love as her best treasure, she is in no mood to be tolerant of the scornful cruelty shown by Phebe to Silvius, of which in the scene that ensues she is an unseen witness. At the same time, his love-sickness, which has taken all the manhood out of him, inspires her with something not very far from contempt. But the poor fellow pleads his cause well. His passion is genuine, and his words are echoes of a feeling in her own heart:—

“ O dear Phebe,
If ever (as that ever may be near)
You meet in some fresh cheek the power of fancy,
Then shall you know the wounds invisible
That love’s keen arrows make.”

They merited at least a gentle answer; and when Phebe heartlessly replies—

“ But till that time,
Come thou not near me : and when that time comes,
Afflict me with thy mocks, pity me not ;
As, till that time, I shall not pity thee ”—

Rosalind can restrain herself no longer, and breaks in upon the speakers. In what ensues she seems to me to show something of that quality, characteristic of princely blood and training, which, without directly claiming deference, somehow commands it, and which is frequently exemplified in the progress of the play:—

“ *Ros.* And why, I pray you ? Who might be your mother,
That you insult, exult, and all at once,
Over the wretched ? What though you have some beauty,
(As, by my faith, I see no more in you,
Than without candle may go dark to bed,)
Must you be therefore proud and pitiless ? ”

How great must have been the charm of the seeming boy, when the haughty rustic beauty does not fire up at such a rebuke as this! Yet there she stands, breathless, all eyes, all admiration. Rosalind continues:—

“Why, what means this? Why do you look on me?
I see no more in you than in the ordinary
Of nature's sale-work. 'Od's my little life,
I think she means to tangle my eyes too!
No, faith, proud mistress, hope not after it:
'Tis not your inky brows, your black silk hair,
Your bugle eyeballs, nor your cheek of cream,
That can entame my spirits to your worship.”

With her wonted readiness of wit she follows up this vivid picture of commonplace beauty by words that, while giving encouragement to Silvius, are cleverly designed to take some of Phebe's conceit out of her:—

“You foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow her? . . .
You are a thousand times a properer man
Than she a woman: 'tis such fools as you
That make the world full of ill-favoured children:
'Tis not her glass, but you, that flatters her. . . .
But, mistress, know yourself: down on your knees,
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love:
For I must tell you friendly in your ear,—
Sell when you can: you are not for all markets.”

Then with a softer tone, almost entreatingly she adds—

“Cry the man mercy; love him; take his offer: . . .
So take her to thee, shepherd: fare you well.”

But Phebe has by this time “felt the power of fancy” too strongly to let the interview break off so soon. “Sweet youth,” she exclaims, as she runs after to detain him,

“I pray you, chide a year together; I had rather hear you chide than this man woo.”

The situation is becoming too absurd. The tables have indeed been turned upon Phebe. With all her sense of humour Rosalind, as a woman, could not but feel some pity for her, as Viola

does for Olivia. She must be told at once, and in unmistakable terms, to put all thought of Ganymede out of her head :—

“*Ros.* I pray you, do not fall in love with me,
For I am falser than vows made in wine.
Besides, I like you not.

.
Will you go, sister? Shepherd [*aside to him*], ply her hard.
Come, sister. Shepherdess [*aside to her*], look on him better,
And be not proud : though all the world could see,
None could be so abused in sight as he.”

I have already called attention to the picture of the boy Ganymede drawn for us by Phebe, after he has left her. It is not merely the beauty of his person that strikes her; she feels the distinction of his bearing,—the unconscious imperiousness of Rosalind, the princess—“Sure, he’s proud; and yet his pride becomes him”—and how this is blended with a strange tenderness, that tempers the severity of his rebuke to herself, for

“Faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up.”

In this scene, as elsewhere, the woman’s heart modifies the keenness of Rosalind’s wit, and the combination makes her ascendancy over all those she cares for more complete.

But when we see her next, at the opening of the fourth act, in colloquy with Jaques, her intellect alone is called into play, and the cynic comes off second-best in the encounter. He, too, feels the attraction of the young Ganymede, and would fain be intimate with him;—“I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee.” To Rosalind this patronising address would be far from agreeable. By a natural instinct she recoils, as we have previously seen Orlando recoil, from the society of a man who has exhausted the zest for life in years of sensual indulgence, and who sees only the dark side of human nature and of the world, because he has squandered his means and used up his finest sensations. She has heard of him and his morbid moralisings, and so replies—

“They say you are a melancholy fellow.”

Her healthy common-sense is roused by his answer, "that he is so, and that he loves it better than laughing," and she replies—

"Those that are in the extremity of either are abominable fellows ; and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards.

Jaq. Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing.

Ros. Why, then, 'tis good to be a post."

Jaques then runs off into his famous definition of the varieties of melancholy, winding up—self-complacent egotist as he is, always referring everything to himself and his own perverted experiences—with the intimation, that "indeed the sundry contemplation of his travels, in which his often rumination wraps him, is a most humorous sadness." This answer in no way increases Rosalind's respect. "A traveller!" she exclaims—

"By my faith, you have great reason to be sad : I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's ; then, to have seen much and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

Jaq. Yes, I have gained my experience.

Ros. And your experience makes you sad : I had rather have a fool to make me merry, than experience to make me sad ; and to travel for it too !"

Jaques, unused to be picked to pieces in this way,—for the people about the banished Duke, though amused by this moping philosopher's churlish temper, seem to stand rather in awe of it,—is glad to take the opportunity afforded by Orlando's appearance to escape from the "pretty youth," whom he has found to be so unexpectedly formidable. But Rosalind cannot refrain from sending after him some further shafts from her quiver :—

"Farewell, Monsieur Traveller : look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide Heaven for making you that countenance you are, or I will scarce think you have swum in a gondola."

Not till she has seen Jaques fairly out of hearing does she turn to Orlando, who has by this time thoroughly learned the first lesson she had set him. He accosts her throughout the scene as "dear Rosalind," "fair Rosalind," and never trips into speaking to the boy otherwise than as the lady of his love. His visits

to the sheepcote, we see, have been frequent, but the promised cure has clearly made no progress. The feminine waywardness with which the boy menaced him has served only to establish a sweet, and, to him, mysterious control over his heart and will. Again he has failed in coming at the appointed hour. See how she punishes him for the little pang of disappointment he has caused her!—

“Why, how now, Orlando! where have you been all this while? You a lover! An you serve me such another trick, never come in my sight more.

Orl. My fair Rosalind, I come within an hour of my promise.

Ros. Break an hour's promise in love! He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath clapped him o' the shoulder, but I'll warrant him heart-whole.

Orl. Pardon me, dear Rosalind.

Ros. Nay, an you be so tardy, come no more in my sight: I had as lief be wooed of a snail.

Orl. Of a snail?

Ros. Ay, of a snail; for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head; a better jointure, I think, than you can make a woman.”

And now we are to see how Rosalind carries out in practice her own suddenly devised fiction of the way she once cured a lover of his passion—by being effeminate, changeable, “full of tears, full of smiles, would now like him, now loathe him, now entertain, now forswear him.” She throws aside her first mood of pouting and banter. Her own heart is brimful of happy love, and only by variety of mood and volubility of utterance can she keep down its emotion. “Come, woo me!” she exclaims. Seeing Orlando taken aback by the suddenness of this invitation, she repeats it: “Woo me; for now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent.” Still he hangs back; but she is not to be foiled in her determination to make him play the lover, so she adds—“What would you say to me now, an I were your very very Rosalind?” This brings from him the laughing answer, “I would kiss before I spoke.” “Nay,” she rejoins, “you were better speak first, and when you were gravelled for lack of matter, you might take occasion to kiss.” After some more badinage on this theme, Rosalind turns suddenly upon Orlando with the question—“Am not I your Rosalind?” and as she does so, her

voice, I fancy, vibrates with feeling she finds it hard to conceal. But this vein is dangerous; and when Orlando answers, "I take some joy to say you are, because I would be talking of her," she dashes off again into her playful mocking mood, with the words, "Well, in her person I say I will not have you." This elicits from Orlando the very avowal for which she yearns—"Then in mine own person I die!" But the opening thus offered to her to profess a disbelief, which she does not feel, in the sincerity of all such protestations is not to be lost, and her fancy revels in throwing ridicule upon the model heroes of romantic love:—

"No, faith, die by attorney. The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, *videlicet*, in a love-cause. Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club; yet he did what he could to die before; and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander, he would have lived many a fair year though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot mid-summer night; for, good youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont, and being taken with the cramp was drowned: and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was—Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies: men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

Orl. I would not have my right Rosalind of this mind: for, I protest, her frown might kill me."

Rosalind's rejoinder, "By this hand, it will not kill a fly," should, I think, be given with a marked change of intonation, sufficient to indicate that, notwithstanding all the wild raillery of her former speech, there is in herself a vein of tenderness which would make it impossible for her to inflict pain deliberately. We should be made to feel the woman just for the moment,—before she passes on to her next words, which, playful as they are, lead her on unawares to what I believe was regarded by her as a very real climax to this sportive wooing:—

"But come, now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition; and ask me what you will, I will grant it.

Orl. Then love me, Rosalind.

Ros. Yes, faith, will I—Fridays and Saturdays, and all.

Orl. And wilt thou have me?

Ros. Ay, and twenty such.

Orl. What say'st thou?

Ros. Are you not good?

Orl. I hope so.

Ros. Why, then, can one desire too much of a good thing?"

Who does not feel through all this exuberance of sportive raillery the strong emotion which is palpitating at the speaker's heart? She has proved and is assured of Orlando's devotion, and now she will plight her troth to him—irrevocably, as she knows, but as he does not know. Turning to Celia, she says:—

“Come, sister, you shall be the priest, and marry us. Give me your hand, Orlando. What do you say, sister?”

Orl. Pray thee, marry us. . . .

Ros. You must begin,—‘Will you, Orlando——’

Cel. Go to. Will you, Orlando, have to wife this Rosalind?

Orl. I will.

Ros. Ay, but when?

Orl. Why now; as fast as she can marry us.

Ros. Then you must say,—‘I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.’

Orl. I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.

Ros. I do take thee, Orlando, for my husband.”

It is not merely in pastime, I feel assured, that Rosalind has been made by Shakespeare to put these words into Orlando's mouth. This is for her a marriage, though no priestly formality goes with it; and it seems to me that the actress should show this by a certain tender earnestness of look and voice, as she replies “I do take thee, Orlando, for my husband.” I could never speak these words without a trembling of the voice, and the involuntary rushing of happy tears to the eyes, which made it necessary for me to turn my head away from Orlando. But, for fear of discovery, this momentary emotion had to be overcome, and turned off by carrying his thoughts into a different channel. Still Rosalind's gravity of look and intonation will not have quite passed away—for has she not taken the most solemn step a woman can take?—as she continues—

“*Ros.* Now tell me how long you would love her, after you have possessed her?”

Orl. For ever and a day.

Ros. Say a day without the ever. No, no, Orlando; men are April when they woo, December when they wed: maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.”

Here, however, Rosalind finds herself running into a strain of serious earnest, with too much of the apprehensive woman in it; so she takes up her former cue of exaggerating the capriciousness of her own sex:—

"I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen ; more clamorous than a parrot against rain ; more new-fangled than an ape ; more giddy in my desires than a monkey : I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry ; I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.

Orl. But will my Rosalind do so ?

Ros. By my life, she will do as I do.

Orl. O, but she is wise.

Ros. Or else she could not have the wit to do this : the wiser the waywarder : make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement ; shut that, and 'twill out at the keyhole ; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney."

Rosalind through all this scene is like the bird "that cannot get out its song" for very joy. She dares not give direct vent to the happiness that fills her heart, and so she seeks relief by letting her fancy run riot in these playful exaggerations. We feel how these flashes of sprightly fancy, that amuse even while they bewilder him, all help to weave a spell of fascination around Orlando's heart. Rosalind sees this, and revelling in her triumph, pursues to the uttermost the course she had told him would cure him of his passion. Observe how this is carried out, when he tells her presently that he must leave her for two hours. Here is an opportunity for showing what Ganymede has formerly told Orlando a woman cannot choose, but must be. She is now to "grieve, be effeminate, changeable."

"*Ros.* Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours.

Orl. I must attend the Duke at dinner : by two o'clock I will be with thee again.

Ros. Ay, go your ways, go your ways ; I knew what you would prove : my friends told me as much, and I thought no less : that flattering tongue of yours won me : 'tis but one cast away, and so,—Come, death !"

This is to be "full of tears" ; and when she has put a pang into her lover's heart by this semblance of reproachful grief, she suddenly floods it with delight by turning to him, her face radiant with smiles, and saying, "Two o'clock's your hour !" This is to be "full of smiles," and the charm so works upon him, that we see he has lost the consciousness that it is the boy Ganymede, and not his own Rosalind, that is before him, as he answers, "Ay, sweet Rosalind." And she too, in her

parting adjuration to him, comes nearer than she has ever done before to letting him see what is in her heart:—

“By my troth, and in good earnest, and so Heaven mend me, and by all pretty oaths that are not dangerous, if you break one jot of your promise, or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathological break-promise, and the most hollow lover, and the most unworthy of her you call Rosalind, that may be chosen out of the gross band of the unfaithful. Therefore, beware my censure, and keep your promise.

Orl. With no less religion than if thou wert indeed my Rosalind: so, adieu!”

Celia—who, admirable as she may be, is by no means of a highly imaginative nature—is no sooner alone with Rosalind than she takes her to task for what appears to her the unfavourable light in which her pictures of the waywardness of women in courtship and in marriage have placed her sex. “You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate,” she says; but this is a matter Rosalind is too full of her own emotions to discuss. Her tongue has run wild in trying to conceal the pressure at her heart; and she has talked herself out of breath only to get deeper in love.

“O coz, coz, my pretty little coz,” she replies, “that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded. . . . That same wicked bastard of Venus, that was begot of thought, conceived of spleen, and born of madness, that blind rascally boy that abuses every one’s eyes because his own are out, let him be judge how deep I am in love. I’ll tell thee, Aliena, I cannot be out of the sight of Orlando: I’ll go find a shadow, and sigh till he come.”

We see from this confession how great has been the constraint she has been keeping upon her emotions through all her sparkling badinage in the interviews with Orlando. He was to be but two hours absent, and had protested he should be with her by two o’clock; but when we next see her, two o’clock has come, but not Orlando. “How say you now?” she says to Celia. “Is it not past two o’clock? and here much Orlando!” While she is in this state of disappointment and unrest, Silvius arrives with the love-letter of which Phebe has made him the bearer. Such is the rare elasticity of Rosalind’s temperament, and the activity of her intelligence, that she at once puts aside

her own vexation—which could not have been small—and does what she can to give something of a manly spirit to this most forlorn of lovers. So far from thinking the letter he has brought to be one of love, he is under the impression, from “the stern brow and waspish action” of Phebe in writing it, that “it bears an angry tenor,” and apologises for being the bearer of it. Rosalind at once follows out this idea, though she has of course seen, by a glance at its contents, how very far this is from the truth:—

“Patience herself would startle at this letter
And play the swaggerer; bear this, bear all:
She says I am not fair, that I lack manners;
She calls me proud; and that she could not love me,
Were man as rare as phoenix. ‘Od’s my will!
Her love is not the hare that I do hunt:
Why writes she so to me? Well, shepherd, well,
This is a letter of your own device.”

In answer to his vehement protestations to the contrary, she goes on to depict its contents with her wonted fertility of fancy:—

“Why, ’tis a boisterous and a cruel style,
A style for challengers. . . . Women’s gentle brain
Could not drop forth such giant-rude invention,
Such Ethiop words, blacker in their effect
Than in their countenance. Will you hear the letter?”

She then proceeds to read it, commenting on its evident avowals of admiration in the same ironical spirit. But when she comes to the lines—

“He that brings this love to thee
Little knows this love in me,”

followed by the request that Ganymede will use Silvius to bear his answer back, she is revolted by Phebe’s treachery, and scarcely less by the pusillanimous insensibility of her suitor to it. Celia, in her matter-of-fact way, exclaims, “Alas, poor shepherd!” But Rosalind, wiser and higher-hearted, takes a different view:—

“Do you pity him? no, he deserves no pity. Wilt thou love such a woman? What, to make thee an instrument and play false strains upon thee! not to be endured!”

But not even this can rouse him ; so she dismisses him in a gentler strain :—

“ Well, go your way to her, for I see love hath made thee a tame snake, and say this to her : That if she love me, I charge her to love thee ; if she will not, I will never have her unless thou entreat for her.”

Still Orlando comes not. The fond woman's heartache, into which some shade of anxiety at his failure to keep his promise would by this time be sure to steal, has not time to reassert itself, when her attention is arrested by a stranger inquiring the way to the “sheepcote fenced about with olive-trees,” which is her home. Attention deepens into interest as she finds from his words that he is a messenger from Orlando :—

“ Orlando doth commend him to you both,
And to that youth he calls his Rosalind
He sends this bloody napkin. Are you he ? ”

Interest now becomes apprehension, and she answers, “ I am : what must we understand by this ? ” With breathless eagerness she listens as the stranger tells how Orlando had found his elder brother asleep in the forest, doubly threatened with death by “ a green and gilded snake ” on the one hand, and on the other by “ a lioness with udders all drawn dry.” The different natures of Celia and Rosalind are well expressed by the ways, each so different, in which they are affected by this narrative. Celia exclaims :—

“ Oh, I have heard him speak of that same brother ;
And he did render him the most unnatural
That lived 'mongst men.”

Rosalind's first thought is not of this brother's cruelty, but whether her lover has forgot the past and interposed to save his life.

“ But, to Orlando : did he leave him there,
Food to the suck'd and hungry lioness ? ”

How her heart leaps within her as she learns that, conquering the first impulse to leave his brother to his fate, Orlando has given “ battle to the lioness, who quickly fell before him ” ! When the stranger goes on to tell them that he is that brother, Rosalind's first impulse naturally is to turn with undisguised

aversion from the man who had for years done Orlando such grievous wrong. But his answer to her question, "Was't you he rescued?" disarms her.

Oli. 'Twas I, yet 'tis not I. I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am."

By the word "conversion," coupled with Oliver's downcast looks and contrite tone, Rosalind is touched. She feels that she has been ungenerous, and turning to him with a much gentler voice and manner, almost as though asking pardon for the resentment she had shown, she asks, "But for the bloody napkin?" And here arises one of the many opportunities which are afforded in this play for that silent suggestive acting which is required to give effect to the purpose of the poet. "The woman, naturally born to fears," has now to be indicated by the changing expression of Rosalind's look and manner, as she listens to Oliver's narrative. Her lover,—her more than lover—her plighted husband ever since she gave him her hand when they last met,—has still further proved his worthiness by making it his first care to introduce his brother to the banished Duke. Still, what does the bloody napkin imply? And how much is there to rouse her alarm, when Oliver goes on to say that, on leaving the Duke, his brother led him to his own cave,

"There stripp'd himself, and here upon his arm
The lioness had torn some flesh away,
Which all this while had bled; and now he fainted,
And cried, in fainting, upon Rosalind"?

The sweet feeling of admiration for her lover's courageous endurance, and of delight that his foremost thought had been of his Rosalind, cannot keep her from thinking of his wound as something more serious than it proves to be. A sick feeling comes over her as Oliver proceeds:—

"Brief, I recover'd him, bound up his wound;
And, after some small space, being strong at heart,
He sent me hither, stranger as I am,
To tell this story, that you might excuse
His broken promise, and to give this napkin
Dyed in his blood unto the shepherd youth,
That he in sport doth call his Rosalind."

As he speaks, Rosalind's vivid imagination brings before her the peril of the contest in which her lover had been engaged, and how near she has been to losing him. The strain upon her feelings is too much even for her powers of self-command, great as they are, and she falls fainting into her cousin's arms. She has borne up, however, so well, that Oliver has no suspicion of her sex, and ascribes her fainting to the not uncommon experience, that "Many will swoon when they do look on blood." When she recovers, and he says to her, "Be of good cheer, youth; you a man! You lack a man's heart," she admits the fact, but, ready and adroit as ever, tries to avert his suspicion by affecting to have merely feigned to swoon. The rest of the scene, with the struggle between actual physical faintness and the effort to make light of it, touched in by the poet with exquisite skill, calls for the most delicate and discriminating treatment in the actress. The audience, who are in her secret, must be made to feel the tender loving nature of the woman through the simulated gaiety by which it is veiled; and yet the character of the boy Ganymede must be sustained. This is another of the many passages to which the actress of comedy only will never give adequate expression. How beautiful it is!—

"Ah, sirrah, a body would think this was well counterfeited! I pray you, tell your brother how well I counterfeited. Heigh-ho!

Oli. This was not counterfeit: there is too great testimony in your complexion that it was a passion of earnest.

Ros. Counterfeit, I assure you.

Oli. Well, then, take a good heart, and counterfeit to be a man.

Ros. So I do: but i'faith, I should have been a woman by right.

Cel. Come, you look paler and paler: pray you, draw homewards. Good sir, go with us.

Oli. That will I, for I must bear answer back, how you excuse my brother, Rosalind.

Ros. I shall devise something: but, I pray you, commend my counterfeiting to him. Will you go?"

And that her quick wit did devise something to the purpose, who can doubt? for it is clear that Orlando's suspicions were not aroused. But in the brief interval that elapses before she again sees him, events have occurred which turn his thoughts into another channel. In that charmed forest region, where every-

thing is "as you like it," events move swiftly. Celia, who has hitherto mocked at love, becomes, as such mockers often do, its unresisting victim. She has met her fate in the repentant Oliver, and he his fate in her. Making all allowance for the necessity of bringing the action of the play to a speedy conclusion, the readiness with which Celia succumbs to Oliver's suit is somewhat startling. Shakespeare perhaps felt this himself, and so does his best to take the edge off its apparent improbability. How wittily has he made Rosalind discourse of it to Orlando!—

"There never was anything so sudden but the fight of two rams, and Cæsar's Thrasonical brag of 'I came, saw, and overcame:' for your brother and my sister no sooner met but they looked, no sooner looked but they loved, no sooner loved but they sighed, no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason, no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy; and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage. . . . They are in the very wrath of love, and they will together; clubs cannot part them."

This is very amusing, but Orlando can only think how enviable is his brother's case compared with his own. "They shall be married to-morrow," he says, "and I will bid the Duke to the nuptial. But, oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes!" The sad earnestness with which this is said finds an echo in Rosalind's own feelings, as she replies, "Why, then, to-morrow I cannot serve your turn for Rosalind?" Can we wonder at his answer, "I can live no longer by thinking"—worked up to a very fever-heat of yearning devotion as he has been to his ideal Rosalind by the hours and days he has spent in playing the lover to the pretty youth who has borne her name, and kept her image continually before him, fascinating him hour after hour by all the qualities which he had dreamed his ideal to possess? When Rosalind had herself got to the point, that she "could not live out of the sight" of her lover, and had learned, by what she suffered at the thought of his recent danger, how essential he had become to her happiness, she was not likely to be deaf to this outcry of Orlando's hungry heart. The time has come for her to yield. But she will keep up a little longer the illusion under which he labours, so she answers:—

"I will weary you no longer then with idle talking. Know of me then, for now I speak to some purpose, . . . that I can do strange things. I have,

since I was three years old, conversed with a magician, most profound in his art, and yet not damnable. If you do love Rosalind so near the heart as your gesture cries it out, when your brother marries Aliena, shall you marry her. I know into what straits of fortune she is driven; and it is not impossible for me, if it appear not inconvenient to you, to set her before your eyes, human as she is, and without any danger.

Orl. Speakest thou in sober meanings?

Ros. By my life, I do; which I tender dearly, though I say I am a magician. Therefore, put you in your best array, bid your friends; for, if you will be married to-morrow, you shall,—and to Rosalind, if you will."

Their colloquy is interrupted by the arrival of Phebe with Silvius. Phebe tasks Ganymede with "much ungentleness" for having shown Silvius her letter. With pretty imperiousness Rosalind replies:—

"I care not if I have : it is my study
To seem ungentle and despiteful to you :
You are there followed by a faithful shepherd ;
Look upon him, love him : he worships you."

The humbled Phebe can only answer by asking Silvius to "tell this youth what 'tis to love." The charming scene which ensues, in which Silvius fulfils his task with a skill the most passionate lyrist might envy, gives Rosalind a further opportunity of assuring herself of her lover's devotion. All that Silvius protests he feels for Phebe, Orlando protests he feels for Rosalind; and when at last, addressing Rosalind, he says, "If this be so, why blame you me to love you?" he speaks as though it were his "very very Rosalind" he was addressing. On this she at once catches him up, saying—

"*Ros.* Whom do you speak to? 'Why blame you me to love you?'

Orl. To her that is not here, nor doth not hear."

But Rosalind, finding the "homily of love," in which Orlando, Silvius, and Phebe echo each other, grow tedious, breaks in upon them with the words—

"Pray you no more of this; 'tis like the howling of Irish wolves against the moon. I will help you [to *Silvius*] if I can: I would love you [to *Phebe*] if I could. To-morrow meet we all together. I will marry you [to *Phebe*] if ever I marry woman, and I'll be married to-morrow. I will satisfy you [to *Orlando*] if ever I satisfied man, and you shall be married to-morrow.

I will content you [to *Silvius*], if what pleases you contents you, and you shall be married to-morrow. As you [to *Orlando*] love Rosalind, meet ; as you [to *Silvius*] love Phebe, meet ; and as I love no woman, I'll meet. So fare you well ; I have left you commands."

The ascendancy which the boy Ganymede has established over all who come within his sphere is so complete, that Orlando, Phebe, and Silvius part from him with a complete belief that he will accomplish everything he has promised. Orlando reports to the Duke the hope that has been held out to him ; and any misgiving he may have had would be dispelled, when presently he finds (Act v sc. 4) that the boy Ganymede comes to ask the banished Duke if, when he shall bring in his daughter, he will give her to Orlando. His answer, "That would I, had I kingdoms to give with her," removes the only obstacle which as a dutiful daughter she would recognise. But not until she has obtained a fresh assurance from Orlando, that he would marry his Rosalind "were he of all kingdoms king," and from Phebe that if she refuses to marry Ganymede she will give herself to Silvius, does she go away "to make all doubts even" by appearing forthwith in her own true character, along with Celia, and led on by "Hymen."

It is Rosalind, of course, who has arranged the masque of Hymen, keeping up to the last the film of glamour which she has thrown around her lover and the other strangers to her secret. Mr Macready, in his revival of the play at Drury Lane, with Mrs Nesbitt as Rosalind, restored it to the stage ; but beautiful as it is in itself, and bringing this charming love-romance most appropriately to a close, yet it delays the action too much for scenic purposes. Hymen's lines, as he leads in Rosalind and Celia in their wedding-robes, are like a strain of sweet music, solemn but not sad, as befits a bridal hymn :—

"Then is there mirth in heaven,
When earthly things made even
Atone together.
Good Duke, receive thy daughter :
Hymen from heaven brought her,
Yea, brought her hither,
That thou might'st join her hand in his
Whose heart within her bosom is."

How beautiful is this last line, and how fully does it express that perfect union of the two lovers' hearts !

With her masking guise, Rosalind drops the witty volubility that has served her purpose so well. Her words are few, but they are pregnant with feeling. Turning to her father, she says, "To you I give myself, for I am yours ;" and while still hanging on his breast, she holds out her hand to Orlando, repeating the same words. What others could so well express the surrender which a loving daughter here makes of herself to the lover "whose heart within her bosom is" ? Her own heart is too full to say much ; her soul too much enwrapped in the thoughts which the climax of marriage brings to a noble woman, for her to sport with the surprise which this sudden revelation produces :—

Duke. If there be truth in sight, you are my daughter.

Orl. If there be truth in sight, you are my Rosalind.

Phebe. If sight and shape be true,

Why, then, my love, adieu !

Ros. I'll have no father, if you be not he ;

I'll have no husband if you be not he ;

Nor ne'er wed woman, if you [to *Phebe*] be not she."

But the "conclusion of these most strange events" is not yet. Oliver, we have been told, had determined to settle upon Orlando "all the revenue that was old Sir Rowland's, and live and die a shepherd in the forest" with his Aliena. She, on the other hand, had, as we have seen, long since told Rosalind that, when Duke Frederick died, Rosalind should be his heir. But now Rosalind is to resume her state by means more direct. The usurping Duke, smitten with remorse, as we learn from Sir Rowland's second son, who at this point appears upon the scene, has taken to a religious life—

"His crown bequeathing to his banish'd brother,
And all their lands restored to them again
That were with him exiled."

Thus is the wrong made right : this alone was wanted to complete the story, *As You Like It*.

No word escapes from Rosalind's lips, as we watch her there, the woman in all her beauty and perfect grace, now calmly happy,

beside a father restored to "a potent dukedom," and a lover whom she knows to be wholly worthy to wield that dukedom, when in due season she will endow him with it as her husband. Happiest of women! for who else ever had such means of testing that love on which her own happiness depends? In the days that are before her, all the largeness of heart, the rich imagination, the bright commanding intellect, which made her the presiding genius of the forest of Arden, will work with no less beneficent sway in the wider sphere of princely duty. With what delight will she recur with her lover-husband to the strange accidents of fortune which "forced sweet love on pranks of saucy boyhood," and to the never-to-be-forgotten hours when he was a second time "o'erthrown" by the wit, the playful wiles, the inexplicable charm of the young Ganymede! How, too, in all the grave duties of the high position to which his alliance will raise him, will Orlando not only possess in her an honoured, beloved, and admired companion, but will also find wise guidance and support in her clear intelligence and courageous will! It is thus, at least, that I dream of my dear Rosalind and her Orlando.

"O, they will walk this world,
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
And so through those dark gates across the wild
That no man knows."

Oliver's proposal to make over his estates to Orlando, and "to live and die a shepherd in the forest," naturally falls to the ground with the reinstatement of Rosalind's father in his duchy. Oliver will resume his former position—his "land and great allies," as Jaques says—and Rosalind and Celia will not be separated. Is it likely that Rosalind should be outdone in generosity? When the heavens were "at their sorrows pale," Celia insisted upon sharing her banishment. Could Rosalind's happiness be complete without the love and presence of that constant dearest friend? No! If they might not henceforward move, "like Juno's swans, still coupled and inseparable," yet they must pass their lives near to each other, and in ever sweet and loving communion.

Much as I have written, I feel how imperfectly I have brought

out all that this delightful play has been and is to me. I can but hope that I have said enough to show why I gave my heart to Rosalind, and found an ever new delight in trying to impersonate her.

Never was that delight greater than the last time I did so. As it happened, it was the last time I appeared upon the stage. The occasion was a benefit, in October 1879, for the widow of Mr Charles Calvert, himself an excellent actor, who had spent many years in producing Shakespeare worthily to the Manchester public at the Prince's Theatre. In his revivals he had kept the scene-painter and the costume-maker under wise control, insisting that what they did should be subservient to the development of character and of plot. His death was justly felt by the Manchester public to be a great loss to the dramatic art, and it was a pleasure to me to join with them in doing honour to his memory. He told me once a pretty story of his wife. He had sent her to see me in Rosalind, at the Theatre Royal—for I never acted in his theatre. On returning home, he found her in tears. Upon inquiring the reason, she replied, "How could you ever allow me to go upon the stage for Rosalind? I am ashamed of myself, for I see I knew nothing about her." It reminded me of what had been my own case, until I had made the loving study of her which I have tried to describe.

I can never forget the warmth of my Manchester friends that night, when I left my retirement to join in helping the widow and children, whom their old manager had left behind him. I had expected, and thought I had nerved myself to meet, a cordial greeting, but this was so prolonged and so overwhelming, that it took away my breath and my courage; and even when at last it ceased, I could not recover myself enough to speak. My agitation quite alarmed the young lady by my side, who acted Celia, Miss Kate Pattison, and we stood like a pair of mutes for a moment or two, until the renewed plaudits of the audience roused us to a sense of what was expected from us. The old sensation of stage-fright, never completely lost, came back upon me as freshly then as upon the night of my first appearance. After a while, when this had somewhat passed away in the interest of the scene, I was full of gratitude to find that I had not

trusted in my privacy. I had found also in the rehearsal of the previous day, which, from the large number attending it, became almost a performance, that I had as much delight as ever in depicting the life of one so dear to my imagination, and that I could do so with as much freshness and elasticity as at the beginning of my career.

I was very much interested in seeing the careful study which the actors on this occasion, mostly amateurs, had given to all the characters, great and small, in the play. It was a pleasure to act beside so much intelligence and artistic talent. I felt quite a keen regret when this not-to-be-repeated performance was over.

How many good parts there are in this play, as indeed there must be in every fine play, and how great would be the delight of acting in it with every character adequately represented! How little do those who usually act what are called the smaller parts in Shakespeare know the gems within their reach, and the splendid opportunities they throw away! I have tried in my rehearsals to bring those who acted with me up to the highest level I could, by calling their attention to these opportunities (though not always with success), and by showing them the value of the passages they had overlooked. Some were incapable of seeing the author's meaning, some indifferent to it; others have looked as though I were taking a liberty, and had no business to leave my own character and interfere with theirs; some few, I am glad to say, have thanked me when they found the audience recognise and appreciate the significance given to the text by following my suggestions.

Out of London I never saw the play of *As You Like It* more fully enjoyed or better acted than in Edinburgh. There, in the first years of my visits, a fine illustration was given of the way in which a minor part may be raised into importance by the actor's skill. Mr Murray, the manager, was the William. Night after night I used to go to the side scene to see the only occasion in which in the fifth act William appears with Touchstone. He was the very man, one felt, whom Shakespeare had in his mind, —dress, voice, look, manner, were all life-like;—just such a blunder-headed, good-natured, staring, grinning, frightened oaf

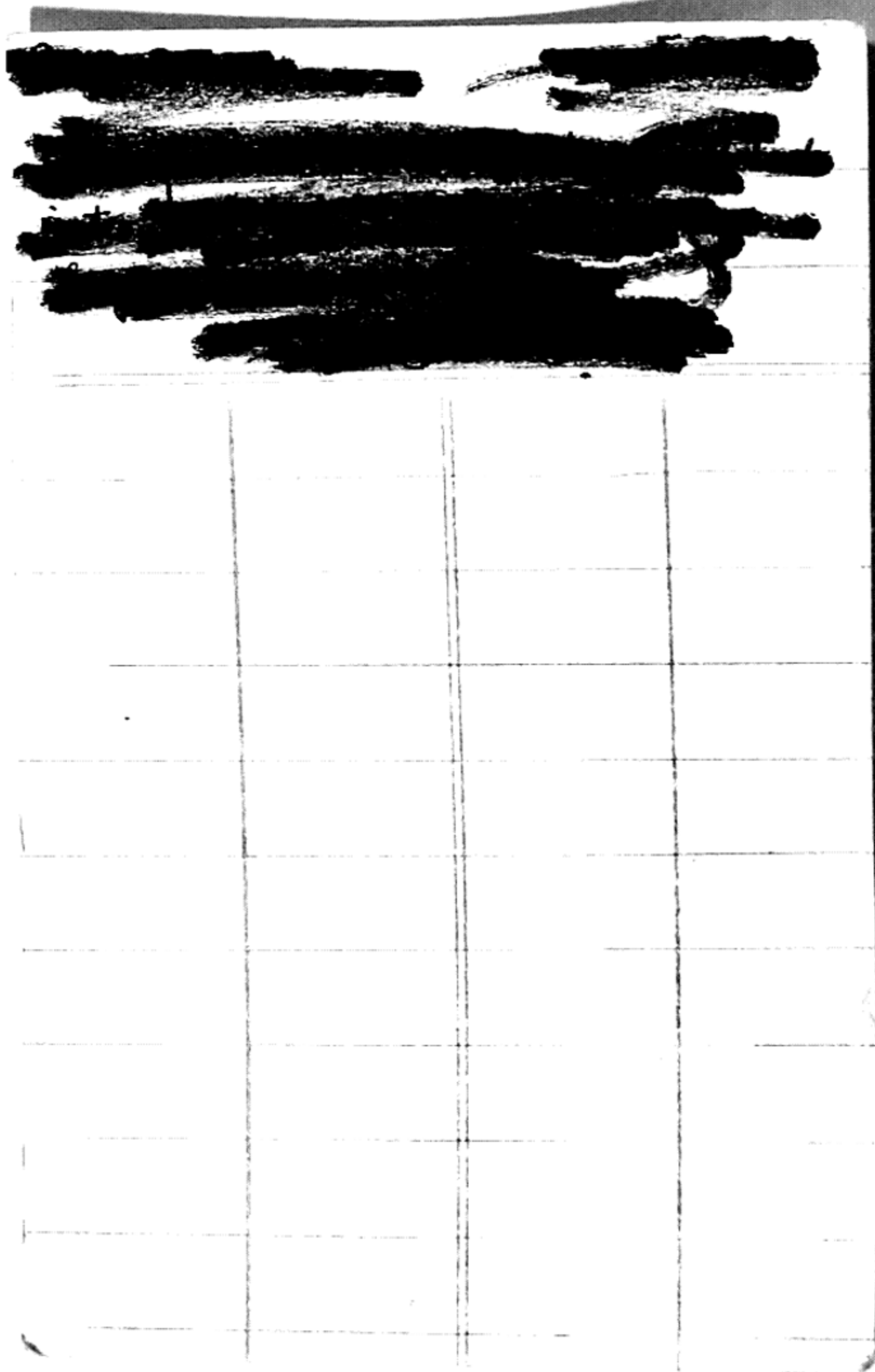
as at once provokes and falls an easy victim to the waggishness of Touchstone. He had so little to say, and yet so much to suggest.

The Touchstone of the same theatre in those days, a Mr Lloyd, was almost the best I have ever seen; and though wanting in the courtly demeanour, which I think is one of Touchstone's characteristics, he brought out the dry, quaint, sententious humour of the man with the happiest effect.

One word about the Epilogue before I conclude. This, as it is written, was fit enough for the mouth of a boy-actor of women's parts in Shakespeare's time, but it is altogether out of tone with the Princess Rosalind. It is the stage tradition to speak it, and I, of course, had to follow the tradition—never, however, without a kind of shrinking distaste for my task. Some of the words I omitted, and some I altered, and I did my best, in speaking it, to make it serve to illustrate how the high-toned winning woman reasserted herself in Rosalind, when she laid aside her doublet and hose. I have been told that I succeeded in this. Still, speaking the Epilogue remained the one drawback to my pleasure. In it one addresses the audience neither as Ganymede nor as Rosalind, but as one's own very self. Anything of this kind was repugnant to me, my desire being always to lose myself in the character I was representing. When taken thus perforce out of my ideal, I felt stranded and altogether unhappy. Except when obliged, as in this instance, I never addressed an audience, having neither the wish nor the courage to do so. Therefore, as I advanced to speak the Epilogue, a painful shyness came over me, a kind of nervous fear, too, lest I should forget what I had to say,—a fear I never had at other times,—and thus the closing words always brought to me a sense of inexpressible relief.

And now, my dear Mr Browning, you must be glad that I have at last come to the end of what I have to say about my much-loved Rosalind. Let me, then, set you free; for which release I hope you will kindly, in the words of that Epilogue, "when I make curtsy, bid me farewell."—Ever most sincerely yours,

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.



VIII.

B E A T R I C E

[REDACTED]

This image shows a full page of blank graph paper. It features a uniform grid of thin black lines forming small squares across the entire surface. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

VIII.

BEATRICE.

“There was a star danced, and under that was I born.”

DEAR MR RUSKIN,—

I AM glad to see by your letter that Beatrice is a favourite with you. The heresy of Campbell and others, which describes her as a compound of tomboy, flirt, and shrew,—“an odious woman,” I think, Campbell calls her,—has manifestly not enlisted you among its adherents. Whilst, therefore, I am sure of your sympathy in trying to put into words the conception of this brilliant and charming woman which I endeavoured to embody on the stage, still I must approach the subject with great trepidation, as you tell me that you are “listening with all your heart to what I shall say of her.” I cannot dare to hope I shall throw much light upon the character that will be new to you, who have shown, in so many places, how thorough has been your study of Shakespeare’s heroines, and with what loving insight you have used them to illustrate the part women have played, and are meant to play, in bringing sweetness and comfort, and help and moral strength, into man’s troubled and perplexing life. The lesson Shakespeare teaches seems to me to be entirely in accordance with your own belief, expressed in many ways, “that no man ever lived a right life who had not been chastened by a

woman's love, strengthened by her courage, and guided by her discretion."

Of Beatrice I cannot write with the same full heart, or with the same glow of sympathy, with which I wrote of Rosalind. Her character is not to me so engaging. We might hope to meet in life something to remind us of Beatrice; but in our dreams of fair women Rosalind stands out alone.

Neither are the circumstances under which Beatrice comes before us of a kind to draw us so closely to her. Unlike Rosalind, her life has been and is, while we see her, one of pure sunshine. Sorrow and wrong have not softened her nature, nor taken off the keen edge of her wit. When we are introduced to her, she is the great lady, bright, brilliant, beautiful, enforcing admiration as she moves "in maiden meditation fancy free" among the fine ladies and accomplished gallants of her circle. Up to this time there has been no call upon the deeper and finer qualities of her nature. The sacred fountain of tears has never been stirred within her. To pain of heart she has been a stranger. She has not learned tenderness or toleration under the discipline of suffering or disappointment, of unsatisfied yearning or failure. Her life has been

"A summer mood,
To which all pleasant things have come unsought,"

and across which the shadows of care or sorrow have never passed. She has a quick eye to see what is weak or ludicrous in man or woman. The impulse to speak out the smart and poignant things that rise readily and swiftly to her lips, is irresistible. She does not mean to inflict pain, though others besides Benedick must at times have felt that "every word stabs." She simply rejoices in the keen sword-play of her wit, as she would in any other exercise of her intellect, or sport of her fancy. In very gaiety of heart she flashes around her the playful lightning of sarcasm and repartee, thinking of them only as something to make the time pass brightly by. "I was born," she says of herself, "to speak all mirth and no matter." Again, when Don Pedro tells her she has "a merry heart," she answers, "Yea, my lord, I thank it; poor fool, it keeps on the windy

side of care." And what does her uncle Leonato say of her?—

"There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lord: she is never sad but when she sleeps; and not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say she hath often dreamt of unhappiness, and waked herself with laughing."—(Act. ii. sc. 1.)

Wooers she has had, of course, not a few; but she has "mocked them all out of suit." Very dear to her is the independence of her maidenhood,—for the moment has not come when to surrender that independence into a lover's hands is more delightful than to maintain it. But though in the early scenes of the play she makes a mock of wooers and of marriage, with obvious zest and with a brilliancy of fancy and pungency of sarcasm that might well appal any ordinary wooer, it is my conviction that, although her heart has not as yet been touched, she has at any rate begun to see in "Signor Benedick of Padua" qualities which have caught her fancy. She has noted him closely, and his image recurs unbidden to her mind with a frequency which suggests that he is at least more to her than any other man. The train is laid, and only requires a spark to kindle it into flame. How this is done, and with what exquisite skill, will be more and more felt the more closely the structure of the play and the distinctive qualities of the actors in it are studied.

Indeed, I think this play should rank, in point of dramatic construction and development of character, with the best of Shakespeare's works. It has the further distinction, that whatever is most valuable in the plot is due solely to his own invention. In this respect it differs signally from *As You Like It*. In *The Tale of Gamelyn*, and more particularly in Lodge's *Rosalynde*, Shakespeare found ready to his hand the main plot of that play, and suggestions for several of the characters. With his usual wonderful aptitude he assimilated everything that could be turned to dramatic account. Yet his debt was after all of no great amount. He had to discard far more than he adopted. The story with the actors in it became a new creation; and by infusing into a pretty but tedious pastoral and some very unreal characters a purpose and a life which were exclusively his own,

he transmuted mere pebbles into gems. But neither for plot nor character was he indebted to any one in *Much Ado About Nothing*. It is no doubt true, that in Ariosto and Bandello and in our own Spenser he found the incident of an innocent lady brought under cruellest suspicion by the base device of which Hero is the victim. Here, however, his obligation ends; and but for the skill with which this incident is interwoven with others, and a number of characters brought upon the scene which are wholly of his own creating, it would be of little value for dramatic purposes.

How happy was the introduction of such men as Dogberry—dear, delightful Dogberry!—and his band, “the shallow fools who brought to light” the flimsy villany by which Don Pedro and Claudio had allowed themselves to be egregiously befooled! How true to the irony of life was the accident, due also to Shakespeare’s invention, that Leonato was so much bored by their tedious prate, and so busy with the thought of his daughter’s approaching marriage, that he did not listen to them, and thus did not hear what would have prevented the all but tragic scene in which that marriage is broken off! And how much happier than all is the way in which the wrong done to Hero is the means of bringing into view the fine and generous elements of Beatrice’s nature, of showing Benedick how much more there was in her than he had imagined, and at the same time proving to her, what she was previously quite prepared to “believe better than reportingly,” that he was of a truly “noble strain,” and that she might safely trust her happiness in his hands! Viewed in this light the play seems to me to be a masterpiece of construction, developed with consummate skill, and held together by the unflagging interest which we feel in Beatrice and Benedick, and in the progress of the amusing plot by which they arrive at a knowledge of their own hearts.

I was called upon very early in my career to impersonate Beatrice; but I must frankly admit that, while, as I have said, I could not but admire her, she had not taken hold of my heart as my other heroines had done. Indeed there is nothing of the heroine about her, nothing of romance or of poetic suggestion in the circumstances of her life—nothing, in short, to captivate the

imagination of a very young girl, such as I then was. It caused me great disquietude when Mr Charles Kemble, who was playing a series of farewell performances at Covent Garden, where I had made my *début* on the stage but a few months before, singled me out to play Beatrice to his Benedick on the night when he bade adieu to his profession. That I who had hitherto acted only the young tragic heroines was to be thus transported out of my natural sphere into the strange world of high comedy, was a surprise indeed. To consent seemed to me nothing short of presumption. I urged upon Mr Kemble how utterly unqualified I was for such a venture. His answer was, "I have watched you in the second act of Julia in *The Hunchback*, and I know that you will by-and-by be able to act Shakespeare's comedy. I do not mean now, because more years, greater practice, greater confidence in yourself, must come before you will have sufficient ease. But do not be afraid. I am too much your friend to ask you to do anything that would be likely to prove a failure." This he followed up by offering to teach me the "business" of the scene. What could I do? He had, from my earliest rehearsals, been uniformly kind, helpful, and encouraging—how could I say him "Nay"? My friends, too, who of course acted for me, as I was under age, considered that I must consent. I was amazed at some of the odd things I had to say,—not at all from knowing their meaning, but simply because I did not even surmise it. My dear home instructor, of whom I have often spoken in these letters, said, "My child, have no fear, you will do this very well. Only give way to natural joyousness. Let yourself go free: you cannot be vulgar, if you tried ever so hard."

And so the performance came, and went off more easily than I had imagined, as so many dreaded events of our lives do pass away without any of the terrible consequences which we have tormented ourselves by anticipating. The night was one not readily to be forgotten. The excitement of having to act a character so different from any I had hitherto attempted, and the anxiety natural to the effort, filled my mind entirely. I had no idea of the scene which was to follow the close of the comedy, so that it came upon me quite unexpectedly.

The "farewell" of a great actor to his admiring friends in the arena of his triumphs was something my imagination had never pictured, and all at once it was brought most impressively before me, touching a deep sad minor chord in my young life. It moved me deeply. As I write, the exciting scene comes vividly before me,—the crowded stage, the pressing forward of all who had been Mr Kemble's comrades and contemporaries,—the good wishes, the farewells given, the tearful voices, the wet eyes, the curtain raised again and again. Ah, how can any one support such a trial! I determined in that moment that, when my time came to leave the stage, I would not leave it in this way. My heart could never have borne such a strain. I need not say that this resolve has remained unchanged. I could not have expected such a demonstrative farewell; but, whatever it might have been, I think it is well the knowledge that we are doing anything for the last time is kept from us. I see now those who had acted in the play asking for a memento of the night,—ornaments, gloves, handkerchiefs, feathers one by one taken from the hat, then the hat itself,—all, in short, that could be detached from the dress. I, whose claim was as nothing compared with that of others, stood aside, greatly moved and sorrowful, weeping on my mother's shoulder, when, as the exciting scene was at last drawing to a close, Mr Kemble saw me, and exclaimed, "What! My Lady baby¹ Beatrice all in tears! What shall I do to comfort her? What can I give her in remembrance of her first Benedick?" I sobbed out, "Give me the book from which you studied Benedick." He answered, "You shall have it, my dear, and many others!" He kept his word, and I have still two small volumes in which are collected some of the plays in which he acted, and also some in which his daughter, Fanny Kemble, who was then married and living in America, had acted. These

¹ I must explain that "baby" was the pet name by which Mr Kemble always called me. I cannot tell why, unless it were because of the contrast he found between his own wide knowledge of the world and of art, and my innocent ignorance and youth. Delicate health had kept me in a quiet home, which I only left at intervals for a quieter life by the seaside, so that I knew, perhaps, far less of the world and its ways than even most girls of my age.

came with a charming letter on the title-page addressed to his "dear little friend."¹

He also told my mother to bring me to him, if at any time she thought his advice might be valuable; and on several occasions afterwards he took the trouble of reading over new parts with me and giving me his advice and help. One thing which he impressed upon me I never forgot. It was, on no account to give prominence to the merely physical aspect of any painful emotion. Let the expression be genuine, earnest, but not ugly. He pointed out to me how easy it was to simulate distortions—for example, to writhe from the supposed effect of poison, to gasp, to roll the eyes, &c. These were melodramatic effects. But if pain or death had to be represented, or any sudden or violent shock, let them be shown in their mental rather than in their physical signs. The picture presented might be as sombre as the darkest Rembrandt, but it must be noble in its outlines; truthful, picturesque, but never repulsive, mean, or commonplace. It must suggest the heroic, the divine, in human nature, and not the mere everyday struggles or tortures of this life, whether in joy or sorrow, despair or hopeless grief. Under every circumstance the ideal, the noble, the beautiful, should be given side by side with the real.

I have always felt what a happy circumstance it was for a shy and sensitive temperament like mine, that my first steps in my art should have been guided and encouraged by a nature so generous and sympathetic as Mr Kemble's. He made me feel that I was on the right road to success, and gave me courage by speaking warmly of my natural gifts, and praising my desire to study and improve, and my readiness in seizing his meaning and profiting by his suggestions. How different it was when, shortly afterwards, I came under Mr Macready's influence! Equally great in their art, Nature had cast the men in entirely different moulds.

¹ The letter was in these terms:—

"11 PARK PLACE, ST JAMES'S.

"MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND,—To you alone do these parts, which once were Fanny Kemble's, of right belong; for from you alone can we now expect the most efficient representation of them. Pray oblige me by giving them a place in your study; and believe me ever your true friend and servant,
"C. KEMBLE."

Each helped me, but by processes wholly unlike. The one, while pointing out what was wrong, brought the balm of encouragement and hope; the other, like the surgeon, who "cuts beyond the wound to make the cure more certain," was merciless to the feelings, where he thought a fault or a defect might so best be pruned away. Both were my true friends, and both were most kind to me, each in his own way of showing kindness. Yet it was well for my self-distrustful nature that the gentler kindness came first.

Mr Kemble never lost an opportunity of making you happy. When Joanna Baillie's play, *The Separation*, was produced within two months of my first appearance, I had, in the heroine Margaret, a very difficult part—quite unlike any I had previously acted or even studied. The story turns upon a wife's hearing that before their marriage her husband had murdered her brother. The play opens with the wife's learning the terrible truth from a dying servant, just as the tidings reach her that her husband has returned safely from battle, and is close at hand. Of course "the Separation" ensues. It must have been a great trouble to Mr Kemble, who played Garcio, the husband, to study a new part at that period of his career, and I wonder that he undertook it. You may imagine how nervous and anxious I felt at attempting the leading character in a play never before acted, and one, moreover, with which I had little sympathy. During the first performance Mr Kemble also appeared very nervous, and at times seemed at a loss for his words. He was deaf, too,—not very deaf, but sufficiently so to make the prompter's voice of no use to him. Happily I was able on several occasions, being close to him, to whisper the words. How I knew them I can hardly tell, because we had not copies of the play to study from, but only our own manuscript parts. But I had heard him repeat them often at rehearsal, and so they had fixed themselves in my memory. Naturally, I thought nothing of this at the time. The next morning, when we met upon the stage to make some little changes in the play, Mr Kemble spoke openly of the help I had been to him, making very much more of it than it deserved, and above all, marvelling at the self-command of the young novice coming with so much readiness to support an old actor,

who should have been on the look-out to do that office for her. I felt much ashamed to be praised for so small a thing. But how quietly glad was the little mouse when she found that she had helped, ever so slightly, her good friend the noble lion!¹

Mr Kemble was before everything pre-eminently a gentleman; and this told, as it always must tell, when he enacted ideal characters. There was a natural grace and dignity in his bearing, a courtesy and unstudied deference of manner in approaching and addressing women, whether in private society or on the stage, which I have scarcely seen equalled. Perhaps it was not quite so rare in his day as it is now. What a lover he must have made! What a Romeo! What an Orlando! I got glimpses of what these must have been in the readings which Mr Kemble gave after he left the stage, and which I attended diligently, with heart and brain awake to profit by what I heard. How fine was his Mercutio! What brilliancy, what ease, what spontaneous flow of fancy in the Queen Mab speech! The very start of it was suggestive—"O, then, I see Queen Mab" (with a slight emphasis on "Mab") "hath been with you!" How exquisite was the play of it all, image rising up after image, one crowding upon another, each new one more fanciful than the last! "Thou talk'st of nothing," says Romeo; but oh what nothings! As picture after picture was brought before you by Mr Kemble's skill, with the just emphasis thrown on every word, yet all spoken "trippingly on the tongue," what objects

¹ I remember well my surprise, when, on going into the Soho Bazaar one day, during the run of *Separation*, and coming to the doll-stall—a never-forgotten spot of interest for me—I saw a doll, labelled "Miss Helen Faucit as the Lady Margaret in *Separation*." Such things were very unusual then, and I felt, oh such a throb of delight! The doll's dress was exactly mine—copied most accurately. I am sure, if I had not thought it would look like vanity, I should have liked to buy my waxen self. Moreover, my funds at that time might not have permitted such extravagance, and I felt too shy to ask the price. She was a grandly got-up lady; and although my salary was the largest ever given in those days, I was, as a minor, only allowed by my friends a slight increase to the pocket-money which had been mine before my *début*. Happily for me, both then and since, money has never been a matter of first importance in my regard. Success in my art, and the preservation of the freshness and freedom of spirit which are essential to true distinction in it, were always my first desire.

that one might see or touch could be more real? I was disappointed in his reading of Juliet, Desdemona, &c. His heroines were spiritless, tearful—creatures too merely tender, without distinction or individuality, all except Lady Macbeth, into whom I could not help thinking some of the spirit of his great sister, Mrs Siddons, was transfused. But, in truth, I cannot think it possible for any man's nature to simulate a woman's, or *vice versa*. Therefore it is that I have never cared very much to listen to "readings" of entire plays by any single person. I have sometimes given parts of them myself; but very rarely, and only, like Beatrice, "upon great persuasion."

Pardon this digression. It was so much my way to live with the characters I represented, that, when I sit down to write, my mind naturally wanders off into things which happened to me in connection with the representation of them. It was some little while before I again performed Beatrice, and then I had for my Benedick Mr James Wallack. He was by that time past the meridian of his life; but he threw a spirit and grace into the part, which, added to his fine figure and gallant bearing, made him, next to Mr Charles Kemble although far beneath him, the best Benedick whom I have ever seen. Oh for something of the fervency, the fire, the undying youthfulness of spirit, the fine courtesy of bearing, now so rare, which made the acting with actors of this type so delightful!

By this time I had made a greater study of the play; moved more freely in my art, and was therefore more able to throw myself into the character of Beatrice than in the days of my novitiate. The oftener I played the character, the more it grew upon me. The view I had taken of it seemed also to find favour with my audiences. I well remember the pleasure I felt, when some chance critic of my Beatrice wrote that she was "a creature overflowing with joyousness,—raillery itself being in her nothing more than an excess of animal spirits, tempered by passing through a soul of goodness." That she had a soul, brave and generous as well as good, it was always my aim to show. All this was easy work to me on the stage. To do it with my pen is a far harder task; but I must try.

It may be a mere fancy, yet I cannot help thinking that

Shakespeare found peculiar pleasure in the delineation of Beatrice, and more especially in devising the encounters between her and Benedick. You remember what old Fuller says of the wit-combats between Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, in which he likens Jonson to a Spanish galleon, "built high, solid, but slow"; and Shakespeare to an English man-of-war, "lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, tacking about and taking advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention." It is just this quickness of wit and invention which is the special characteristic of both Benedick and Beatrice. In their skirmishes, each vies with each in trying to outflank the other by jest and repartee; and, as is fitting, the victory is generally with the lady, whose adroitness in "tacking about, and taking advantage of all winds," gives her the advantage even against an adversary so formidable as Benedick.

That Beatrice is beautiful, Shakespeare is at pains to indicate. If what Wordsworth says was ever true of any one, assuredly it was true of her, that

"Vital feelings of delight
Had reared her form to stately height."

Accordingly we picture her as tall, and with the lithe elastic grace of motion which should come of a fine figure and high health. We are made to see very early that she is the sunshine of her uncle Leonato's house. He delights in her quaint, daring way of looking at things; he is proud of her, too, for with all her sportive and somewhat domineering ways, she is every inch the noble lady, bearing herself in a manner worthy of her high blood and courtly breeding. He knows how good and sound she is in heart no less than in head,—one of those strong natures which can be counted on to rise up in answer to a call upon their courage and fertility of resource in any time of difficulty or trouble. Her shrewd sharp sayings have only a pleasant piquancy for him. Indeed, however much weak colourless natures might stand in awe of eyes so quick to detect a flaw, and a wit so prompt to cover it with ridicule, there must have been a charm for him and for all manly natures in the very peril of coming under the fire of her raillery. A young, beauti-

ful, graceful woman, flashing out brilliant sayings, charged with no real malice, but with just enough of a sting in them to pique the self-esteem of those at whom they are aimed, must always, I fancy, have a peculiar fascination for mén of spirit. And so we see, at the very outset, it was with Beatrice. Not only her uncle, but Don Pedro and the Count Claudio also, have the highest admiration of her. That she was either a vixen or a shrew was the last idea that could have entered their minds. "By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady!" says Don Pedro; and the words express what was obviously the general impression of all who knew her best.

How long Benedick and Beatrice have known each other before the play begins is not indicated. I think we may fairly infer that their acquaintance is of some standing. It certainly did not begin when Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon, in passing through Messina (on his way probably to attack the Turks, with whom Spain, Austria, and Venice were at war about the period to which we may reasonably assign the action of the play), picked Benedick up, and attached him to his suite. They were obviously intimate before this. At all events there had been time for an antagonism to spring up between them, which was natural, where both were witty, and both accustomed to lord it somewhat, as witty people are apt to do, over their respective circles. Benedick could scarcely have failed to draw the fire of Beatrice by his avowed and contemptuous indifference to her sex, if by nothing else. To be evermore proclaiming, as we may be sure he did, just as much before he went to the wars as he did after his return, that he rated all women cheaply, was an offence which Beatrice, ready enough although she might be herself to make epigrams on the failings of her sex, was certain to resent. Was it to be borne that he should set himself up as "a professed tyrant to her whole sex," and boast his freedom from the vassalage to "love, the lord of all"? And this, too, when he had the effrontery to tell herself, "It is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted."

It is true that Beatrice, when she is pressed upon the point, has much the same pronounced notions about the male sex, and the bondage of marriage. But she does not, like Benedick, go

about proclaiming them to all comers ; neither does she denounce the whole male sex for the faults or vices of the few. Besides, there has clearly been about Benedick, in these early days, an air of confident self-assertion, a tendency to talk people down, which have irritated Beatrice. The name "Signor Montanto," borrowed from the language of the Italian fencing-school, by which she asks after him in the first sentence she utters, and her announcement that she had "promised to eat all of his killing," seem to point to the first of these faults. And may we not take as an indication of the other her first remark to himself, "I wonder you will still be talking, Signor Benedick ; nobody marks you ;" and also the sarcasm in her description of him to her uncle, as "too like my lady's eldest son, evermore tattling" ?

What piques Beatrice, also, is the undeniable fact that this contemptuous Benedick is a handsome, gallant young soldier, a general favourite, who makes his points with trenchant effect in the give and take of their wit-combats, and, in short, has more of the qualities to win the heart of a woman of spirit than any of the gallants who have come about her. She, on the other hand, has the attraction for him of being as clever as she is handsome, the person of all his circle who puts him most upon his mettle, and who pays him the compliment of replying upon his sharp sayings with repartees, the brilliancy of which he cannot but acknowledge, even while he smarts under them. We can tell he is far from insensible to her beauty by what he says of her to Claudio when contrasting her with Hero. "There is her cousin, and she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December." No wonder, therefore, that, as we see, they have often come into conflict, creating no small amusement to their friends, and to none more than to Leonato. When Beatrice, in the opening scene of the play, says so many biting things about Benedick, Leonato, anxious that the Messenger shall not carry away a false notion of their opinion of him, says, "You must not, sir, mistake my niece ; there is a kind of merry war between Signor Benedick and her ; they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them." Life, perhaps, has not been

so amusing to Leonato since Signor Benedick went away. It is conceivable that Beatrice herself may have missed him, if for nothing else than for the gibes and sarcasm which had called her own exuberance of wit into play.

I believe we shall not do Beatrice justice unless we form some idea, such as I have suggested, of the relations that have subsisted between her and Benedick before the play opens. It would be impossible otherwise to understand why he should be uppermost in her thoughts, when she hears of the successful issue of Don Pedro's expedition, so that her first question to the Messenger who brings the tidings is whether Benedick has come back with the rest. Finding that he has returned unscathed "and as pleasant as ever he was," she proceeds to show him under no very flattering aspect. Her uncle, knowing how very different Benedick is from the man she wittily describes, tries to stop her by saying, "Faith, niece, you tax Signor Benedick too much ; but he'll be meet with you, I doubt not." This only stimulates her to such further travesty of his character, that the Messenger observes, "I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books." In sheer enjoyment of her own humour, she rejoins—"No : an he were, I would burn my study. But I pray you," she continues, insensibly betraying her interest in him by the question, "who is his companion?" And when the Messenger answers, "The right noble Claudio," the humorous exaggeration of her language gives a delightful foretaste of what we may expect when she encounters Benedick himself :—

"O Lord ! He will hang upon him like a disease ; he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. Heaven help the noble Claudio !¹ If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

Mess. I will hold friends with you, lady.

Beat. Do, good friend.

Leon. You'll ne'er run mad, niece.

Beat. No, not till a hot January."

¹ In some recent reproductions of Shakespeare's plays, the frequent repetition of the name of the Deity has struck most painfully upon my ear. I suppose, when Shakespeare wrote, the familiar use of this sacred name, like many other things repugnant to modern taste, was not generally condemned. In this play the name of "God" occurs continually, and upon

At this point Don Pedro enters with his suite, and Benedick among them. It is not long before he draws upon himself, and deservedly too, a shaft from the quiver of Beatrice's wit. When Don Pedro, turning to Hero, says, "I think this is your daughter," and Leonato rejoins, "Her mother hath many times told me so," Benedick strikes in with the somewhat impertinent freedom of a privileged jester, "Were you in doubt, Signor, that you asked her?" Leonato retorts upon him, "Signor Benedick, no; for then were you a child." "You have it full, Benedick," exclaims Don Pedro; "we may guess by this what you are, being a man,"—adding, "Truly, the lady fathers herself; be happy, lady! for you are like an honourable father." Benedick, a little stung by Leonato's repartee, now grows rude. "If Signor Leonato," he says, "be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is." The others turn away to converse together, but Beatrice, indignant at what she considers his impertinent speech to her uncle, addresses him tauntingly with—

"I wonder you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you.

Bene. What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

Beat. Is it possible disdain should die, while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain if you come in her presence."

In the dialogue which ensues, Benedick falls at once into his old habit of boasting that women love him, but that he cannot love them. In what he says, he is unmannerly rather than witty; and finding very soon that he has the worst of the encounter, he is glad to break off the interview, telling Beatrice, "I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, o' heaven's name; I have

the most trivial occasions. It so happens that it rises to Beatrice's lips more often than to any other's. In the books from which I studied, "Heaven" was everywhere substituted for it; and I confess the word sounds pleasanter and softer to my ear, besides being in the circumstances less irreverent. I cannot help the feeling, though it may be considered fastidious. The name of the Deity, I think, should never rise lightly to the lips, or be used upon slight cause. There are, of course, occasions when, even upon the stage, it is the right word to use. But these are rare, and only where the prevailing strain of thought or emotion is high and solemn.

done." She is ready with her retort, "You always end with a jade's trick; I know you of old."

When Beatrice leaves the scene, and Benedick remains behind with Claudio, he can give full vent to his disparagement of all womankind with no fear of rebuke. In vain does Claudio try to extract from him some encouragement in his admiration of Leonato's daughter Hero. "In mine eye," says Claudio, "she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on." But Benedick can "see no such matter." Then it is he drops out the acknowledgment, that Beatrice excels her cousin in beauty as "the first of May doth the last of December," if only she were not "possessed with a fury"—a qualification made in very soreness at the triumph her superior skill in the *carte* and *tierce* of badinage has so recently given her over him. Claudio, who, on seeing Hero again, finds that the admiration he had felt for her before going to the war has deepened into an absorbing passion, writhes under the banter of his unsympathetic friend, and is very glad to have the support of Don Pedro, who now joins them. His coming is the signal for Benedick to start off afresh into protestations of his indifference to the whole female sex, and of his fixed determination to live a bachelor. When Don Pedro, who knows human nature a great deal too well to take such protestations for serious earnest, says, "I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love," Benedick rejoins, "With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, but not with love." Don Pedro adheres to his opinion, quoting the line, "In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke"; and this draws from Benedick the protest, on which so much of the humour of what happens afterwards depends,—

"*Bene.* The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead: and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write, 'Here is good horse to hire,' let them signify under my sign, 'Here you may see Benedick the married man.'

D. Pedro. Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly.

Bene. I look for an earthquake too, then."

Benedick gone, Claudio is free to open the state of his heart

to his patron and friend, Don Pedro. He fears his liking may seem too sudden, and explains that it was of old standing. Before he had gone with the Prince on the expedition just ended, he had looked on Hero

“with a soldier’s eye,
That liked, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love.
But now I am return’d, and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying, I liked her ere I went to wars.”

This being the state of his heart, why should he not have urged his suit in person? Instead of doing so, however, he unwisely adopts Don Pedro’s suggestion, that she should be wooed by proxy :—

“I know we shall have revelling to-night :
I will assume thy part in some disguise,
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio ;
And in her bosom I’ll unclasp my heart,
And take her hearing prisoner with the force
And strong encounter of my amorous tale.”

Brides for princes have often been wooed by proxy, and with results not always satisfactory to the princes, but here the order of things is reversed. Surely the man who could leave another to plead for him in such a cause can have no great strength of character ; and that this is true of Claudio seems to me to be very clearly shown by his subsequent conduct. Presently we see how easily he allows himself to be swayed by what other people say, as weak men will, when Don Pedro’s brother, Don John, to gratify the personal grudge he feels for having been supplanted by Claudio in his brother’s regard, persuades him that Don Pedro is playing him false, and wooing Hero for himself. The discovery that this was merely a malicious fiction would have put most men upon their guard against believing any further innuendo from the same quarter. But Claudio is still perfectly ready to give credence to Don John’s subsequent accusation against Hero, and to jump to the conclusion that it is true, upon evidence which could have surely misled no manly and generous mind. The very look, morose and vindictive, of

Don John ought to have inspired him with distrust. What that look was, Beatrice puts vividly before us in a sentence or two at the opening of the second act. The whole passage is delightful.

Leonato. Was not Count John here at supper?

Antonio. I saw him not.

Beatrice. How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burned an hour after.

Hero. He is of a very melancholy disposition.

Beat. He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick; the one is too like an image, and says nothing; and the other too like my lady's eldest son, evermore tattling.

Leon. Then half Signor Benedick's tongue in Count John's mouth, and half Count John's melancholy in Signor Benedick's face—

Beat. With a good leg, and a good foot, uncle, and money enough in his purse, such a man could win any woman in the world,—if he could get her good-will.

Leon. By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of tongue.

Beat. . . . For the which blessing I am upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord! I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face. . . .

Leon. You may light upon a husband that hath no beard.

Beat. What should I do with him? Dress him in my apparel, and make him my waiting-gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth; and he that hath no beard is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him."

Who does not see what a pleasant person Beatrice must have been in her uncle's home, with all this power of saying the quaint and unexpected things which bubble up from an uncontrollable spirit of enjoyment? Her frankness must indeed have been a pleasant foil to the somewhat characterless and over-gentle Hero. See how fearlessly she presently tells Hero not to take a husband of her father's choosing, unless he pleases herself. She has just heard of the Prince's intention to make suit to Hero at the coming masked ball; and when Antonio tells Hero that he trusts she will not follow Beatrice's creed, but "be ruled by her father," Beatrice rejoins:—

"Yes, faith; it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy, and say, 'As it please you:'—but yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy, and say, 'Father, as it please me!'"

Leonato loves Beatrice too well to be angry at this instigation to possible rebellion, and only answers her with the words, "Well, niece, I hope to see *you* one day fitted with a husband." Beatrice is by no means at the end of her resources. She is bent on making light of all matrimonial projects. In what she goes on to say we have the counterpart of what Benedick in the previous scene had said to Don Pedro and Claudio; and so the groundwork is laid for the coming contrast between their protestations of resolute celibacy and their subsequent engagement.

"*Beat.* Not till Heaven make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? To make account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? No, uncle, I'll none. Adam's sons are my brethren; and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred.

Leon. Daughter, remember what I told you. If the Prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

Beat. The fault will be in the music, cousin, if you be not wooed in good time. If the Prince be too importunate, tell him there is measure in everything, and so dance out the answer. For, hear me, Hero; wooing, wedding, and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace. The first suit is hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding, mannerly-modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and, with his bad legs, falls into the cinque-pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.

Leon. Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

Beat. I have a good eye, uncle: I can see a church by daylight."

Beatrice is now in the gayest spirits and in the very mood to encounter her old enemy, Benedick. He appears forthwith at the revel at Leonato's house, masked like the other guests. Benedick has thrown himself in her way; he has danced with her; and thinking she does not penetrate the disguise of his domino and mask, and feigned voice, has been telling her he had been informed that her wit was borrowed and her temper disdainful. She knows him at once, but affects not to do so; and thus in the dialogue that follows between them the actress has the most delightful scope for bringing out the address, the graceful movement, the abounding joyousness which makes Beatrice the paragon of her kind. With a plaintive, ill-used air she asks him—

Beat. Will you not tell me who told you so ?

Bene. (in a feigned voice). No, you shall pardon me.

Beat. Nor will you not tell me who you are ?

Bene. Not now.

Beat. That I was disdainful,—and that I had my good wit out of ‘The Hundred Merry Tales.’ ”

Then, as if the truth had just flashed upon her, she continues—

“ Well, this was Signor Benedick that said so.

Bene. What’s he ?

Beat. I am sure you know him well enough.

Bene. Not I, believe me.

Beat. Did he never make you laugh ?

Bene. I pray you, what is he ? ”

By this time Benedick has begun to wish himself anywhere but where he is. But his restlessness only stimulates Beatrice to take her full revenge upon him, by presenting him in the light which to a high-spirited man would be intolerable. Never again shall he venture to say she had her wit out of ‘The Hundred Merry Tales.’

“ *Beat.* Why, he is the Prince’s jester : a very dull fool ; only his gift is in devising impossible slanders. None but libertines delight in him ; and the commendation is not in his wit but in his villainy ; for he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him. . . . ”

Benedick tries to break away from her, saying, “ When I know the gentleman, I’ll tell him what you say ; ” but he is not yet allowed to escape.

“ Do, do ! ” says Beatrice, mocking him. “ He’ll but break a comparison or two on me ; which, peradventure, not marked, or not laughed at, strikes him into melancholy ; and then there’s a partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night.”

With this Beatrice lets him go ; but how deeply her barbed shafts have pierced him is seen anon, when he returns to the scene. He has been laughing at Claudio for, as he believes, letting Don Pedro win his mistress Hero for himself ; but no sooner does Claudio leave him, enraged against the Prince, than the gibes of the Lady Beatrice recur to his memory :—

“ That my lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me ! The Prince’s fool ! Ha ! it may be, that I go under that title, because I am

merry. Yea ; but so ; I am apt to do myself wrong. I am not so reputed. It is nought but the bitter disposition of Beatrice, that puts the world into her person, and so gives me out. Well, I'll be revenged as I may."

"As he may !" There is an amusing despair in the confession. He feels that Beatrice has fairly driven him off the field. This becomes more apparent when Don Pedro breaks in upon his musing with these unwelcome words, "The lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you ; the gentleman that danced with her told her she is much wronged by you." Poor Benedick at once lets out the secret, which Beatrice had kept from the Prince, that the gentleman in question was himself. Indignation makes him eloquent and witty even beyond his wont.

"O, she misused me past the endurance of a block. An oak, but with one green leaf on it, would have answered her. My very visor began to assume life and scold with her. She told me, not thinking I had been myself,"—ah, where then was his vaunted shrewdness?—"that I was the Prince's jester, and that I was duller than a great thaw, huddling jest upon jest, with such impossible conveyance upon me, that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs. . . . I would not marry her, though she were endowed with all that Adam had left him before he transgressed."

Not marry her ! Are we to read in this, that Benedick had at some time nourished dreams about her, not wholly consistent with his creed of celibacy ? Not unlikely, if we couple this remark with what he had said to Claudio about her beauty as compared with Hero's. But, while they speak, Beatrice is seen approaching with her Uncle, Claudio, and Hero, and in the same spirit of exquisite exaggeration Benedick, who in his present mood will not run the risk of a fresh encounter, asks Don Pedro if he will not "command him any service to the world's end ?" offering to go anywhere, do anything, "rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy," and makes his escape, exclaiming as he goes, "O God, sir, here's a dish I love not ; I cannot endure my Lady Tongue." All this time Benedick quite forgets that he was himself to blame, if Beatrice has dealt sharply with him ; for had he not given her the severest provocation by attacking her under the shelter of his mask ? If volubility of speech were her sin, how much greater was his ! Rich as her

invention is, and fertile her vocabulary, Benedick excels her in both. But what great talker ever knew his own weakness?

Meanwhile Beatrice has been requested by Don Pedro to bring Count Claudio. She has evidently found out, by the way, the secret of his sullenness; and when Don Pedro inquires the cause, she puts the case with her usual aptness and pleasantry, "The Count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well: but civil Count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion." He is speedily disabused of his suspicions, and made happy by Don Pedro's assurance that Hero has been won for him, and her father's "goodwill obtained."

Despite of all that she has said against marriage for herself, Beatrice, who is in Hero's secret, is glad of a result which makes her cousin happy. "Speak, Count," she says to Claudio, who has scarcely recovered from his surprise, "'tis your cue." And when he does speak, and very well too, she turns with a similar adjuration to Hero.

Beat. Speak, cousin; or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let him not speak neither.

D. Pedro. In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

Beat. Yea, my lord: I thank it, poor fool, it keeps on the windy side of care."

But she is for the moment too intent on watching the lovers to think of herself, and she continues—

"My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

Claud. And so she doth, cousin.

Beat. Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes every one to the world but I, and I am sunburnt; I may sit in a corner, and cry, heigho! for a husband.

D. Pedro. Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

Beat. I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your grace ne'er a brother like you? Your father got excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them.

D. Pedro. Will you have me, lady?

Beat. No, my lord, unless I might have another for working-days. Your grace is too costly to wear every day."

Here, true lady as she is, it crosses her mind that her high spirits may have carried her too far, and may lead the Prince to misunderstand her. With the bright and innocent frankness which obviously gives her a special charm in his eyes, she prays his forgiveness.

"I beseech your grace, pardon me! I was born to speak all mirth, and no matter.

D. Pedro. Your silence most offends me, and to be merry best becomes you; for, out of question, you were born in a merry hour."

With just the slightest inflection of pathos in her voice Beatrice replies—

"No, sure, my lord, my mother cry'd; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born. Cousins, Heaven give you joy!"

Her uncle now asks her "to look to some things he had told her of." Be sure that Beatrice was the presiding spirit in his household. How sweetly and readily does she go upon his bidding! "I cry you mercy, uncle;" then curtseying to the Prince of Aragon, "By your grace's leave!" to excuse herself for leaving thus abruptly. When she has gone, Don Pedro sums up his impression of her in the words, "By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady." In answer to his remark that Beatrice "cannot endure to hear tell of a husband," Leonato says, "O, by no means: she mocks all her wooers out of suit!" Don Pedro has, however, seen enough of the relations between her and Benedick to conclude that a worse thing might befall them, than that their witty warfare should be turned to wooing. He has obviously a strong regard for both, and he "would fain have it a match." She, he says, "were an excellent wife for Benedick;" and Benedick, a man "of noble strain, of approved valour, and confirmed honesty," as he knows him to be, is "not the unhopefullest husband that he knows." So, to beguile the week that is to elapse before Claudio's marriage, he undertakes "to bring them into a mountain of affection, the one with the other." Hero, acting upon the suggestions Don Pedro will give her, is so to "humour" her cousin, "that she shall fall in love with Benedick;" while he himself, along with Leonato and Claudio, are so to "practise on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach," he shall fall in love with Beatrice.

While they are perfecting their little well-meant plot, Don John and his retainer, Borachio, are hatching theirs for destroying Hero's reputation and breaking off her marriage, by making Don Pedro and Count Claudio believe that, on the night before

her wedding-day, they see Borachio leave her chamber by the window. The way in which the temporary success of this second plot is made to work most effectually for the permanent success of the first, is one of the many proofs of Shakespeare's transcendent skill in dramatic construction.

There is no need to speak at length of the admirable scene in which Don Pedro, Leonato, and Count Claudio persuade Benedick that Beatrice dotes upon him, while "she hath in all outward behaviours seemed ever to abhor him," and "will die ere she will make her love known." So cleverly is the dialogue managed, that Benedick must have had a heart of stone, as well as superhuman acuteness, had he not been moved by it. He does not easily fall into the snare. Don Pedro alone could not have deceived him. But how can he refuse to believe Leonato, "the white-bearded fellow," whom he knows to be devoted to Beatrice? Was it conceivable that he, her uncle and guardian, should be speaking pure fiction, when he says that "she loves Benedick with an enraged affection,—it is past the infinite of thought"? And why should Claudio, his own familiar and trusted friend, be in the same tale, unless he had really learned from Hero, as he says he has, the true state of Beatrice's affection, and "that she will die ere she make her love known"?

The conspirators have not spared Benedick, while extolling Beatrice—dwelling much on his scornful and contemptuous spirit,—Don Pedro, at the same time that he protests he "loves him well," adding very craftily a wish, that Benedick "would modestly examine himself, to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady." Benedick's first thought is not of his own shortcomings. In this, as we presently see, he is very different from Beatrice. He at once, with pardonable complacency, accepts the fact that Beatrice loves him; in that belief all his former invectives against her are forgotten, and he feels her love "must be requited." She is no longer "Lady Disdain," "the fury," "the harpy." On the contrary she is "fair," "virtuous," "wise, but in loving him." In any case he "will be horribly in love with her;" and, so possessed is he with the triumphant feeling that he stands high in her regard, that when she presently appears to tell him she is "sent against her

will to bid him come in to dinner," he actually "spies some marks of love in her," and finds a meaning flattering to the thought in the very phrases which she studiously uses to prove with what reluctance she had come upon the errand. He leaves the scene, protesting, "I will go get her picture!"

Now it is Beatrice's turn to fall into a similar snare. It is laid for her by Hero and her gentlewoman Ursula; and in the very exuberance of a power that runs without effort into the channel of melodious verse, Shakespeare passes from the terse vivid prose of the previous scene into rhythmical lines, steeped in music and illumined by fancy. Margaret is despatched to tell Beatrice that her cousin and Ursula are talking about her, and to

"bid her steal into the pleached bower,
Where honeysuckles, ripened by the sun,
Forbid the sun to enter."

And anon we see her,

"like a lapwing, run
Close by the ground, to hear their conference."

It is of course an overwhelming surprise to Beatrice to hear that "Benedick loves her so entirely." She is at first incredulous. Still her attention is fairly arrested. She listens with eager curiosity; but begins to feel a tightening at the heart when her cousin says—

"But nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice:
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on; and her wit
Values itself so highly, that to her
All matter else seems weak. She cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear'd.

Urs. Sure, I think so;
And therefore, certainly, it were not good,
She knew his love, lest she make sport of it."

Hero with a power of witty and somewhat merciless sarcasm, new to Beatrice in her gentle cousin, drives still further home the charge of pride and scornfulness:—

“Why, you speak truth : I never yet saw man,
 How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,
 But she would spell him backward : if fair-faced,
 She'd swear the gentleman should be her sister ;
 If black, why nature, drawing of an antic,
 Made a foul blot ; if tall, a lance ill-headed ;
 If low, an agate very vilely cut ;
 If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds ;
 If silent, why, a block moved with none.”

All this somewhat surprises and yet amuses Beatrice, for it reminds her of her own thoughts about some of her unsuccessful wooers. But what follows sends the blood in upon her heart :—

“So turns she every man the wrong side out ;
 And never gives to truth and virtue that
 Which simpleness and merit purchaseth.”

Why, why, if this be so, has not Hero let her hear of it from herself ? The feeling of shame and bitter self-reproach deepens as Hero goes on :—

“To be so odd, and from all fashions,
 As Beatrice is, cannot be commendable :
 But who dare tell her so ? If I should speak,
 She would mock me into air : O, she would laugh me
 Out of myself, press me to death with wit.
 Therefore let Benedick, like covered fire,
 Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly—
 It were a better death than die with mocks.”

We know that all this is overstated for a purpose. But Beatrice has no such suspicion. She is wounded to the quick, and Hero's words strike deeper, because Beatrice up to this time has seen no signs of her cousin having entertained this harsh view of her character. The cup of self-reproach is full, as Hero proceeds :—

“No, I will rather go to Benedick,
 And counsel him to fight against his passion.
 And, truly, I'll devise some honest slanders
 To stain my cousin with : one doth not know
 How much an ill word doth empoison liking.”

This was too much, and it seemed to me, as I listened, as if I could endure no more, but must break from my concealment and stop their cruel words. Ursula's more kindly rejoinder is some balm to Beatrice :—

"O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.
She cannot be so much without true judgment,
(Having so swift and excellent a wit
As she is prized to have) as to refuse
So rare a gentleman as Signor Benedick."

What follows is not unwelcome to her ears, for it is all in praise of Benedick as one who—

"For shape, for bearing, argument, and valour,
Goes foremost in report through Italy."

When they are gone, and Beatrice comes from her hiding-place in "the pleached bower," she has become to herself another woman. It is not so much that her nature is changed, as that it has been suddenly developed. She is dazed, astounded at what she has overheard. "What fire is in mine ears?" she exclaims; "Can this be true?" Am I such a self-assured, scornful, disdainful, vainglorious creature? Is it thus I appear even to those who know me best, and whom I love the best? Do I look down contemptuously on others from the height of my own deserts? Am I so "self-endear'd" that I see worth and cleverness only in myself? Do I carry myself thus proudly? Have I been living in a delusion? Have my foolish tongue and giddy humour presented me in a light so untrue to my real self? What an awakening! She does not blame others. She feels no shade of bitterness against Hero, her reproaches are all against herself. "Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?" There must be an end to this, and quickly.

"Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!
No glory lives behind the back of such."

After this complete self-abasement comes fresh wonder, in the remembrance of what Hero and Ursula have said of Benedick's infatuation for her. That he likes her she has probably suspected more than once; and now she learns that it is her wicked mocking spirit which has alone prevented him from making an open avowal of his devotion. All this shall be changed. If, despite the past, he indeed loves her, he must be rewarded. No one knows his good qualities better than she does. She will accept his shortcomings—for what grave faults of her own has

she not to correct?—and for the future touch them so gently, that in time they will either vanish, or she will hardly wish them away. Henceforth she must give him such encouragement as will make him happy in the avowal of his love.

“ And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To tie our loves up in a holy band :
For others say thou dost deserve ; and I
Believe it better than reportingly.”

It is now that for the first time we see the underlying nobleness and generosity of Beatrice leap into view. If she were indeed what Hero described—still more, if this were, as Hero had said, the general impression—she might well be excused, had she asked why Hero, her bosom friend, her “bedfellow,” as we are subsequently told, had never hinted at faults so serious? But Beatrice neither reproaches her cousin nor seeks to extenuate the defects laid to her charge. She trusts Hero’s report implicitly, and being herself incapable of deceit or misrepresentation, she regards Hero’s heavy indictment as a thing not to be impugned. The future, she resolves, shall make it impossible for any one to entertain such a conception of her as Hero has described.

This is the turning-point in Beatrice’s life, and in the representation it should be shown by her whole demeanour, and especially by the way the lines just quoted are spoken, that a marked change has come over her since, “like a lapwing,” she stole into the bower of honeysuckles. Thus the audience will be prepared for the development of the high qualities which she soon afterwards displays.

She is, then, one of the brilliant group that accompanies Hero to the altar. When Claudio brings forward his accusation against his bride, Beatrice is struck dumb with amazement. Indignation at the falsehood of the charge, and at the unmanliness that could wait for such a moment to make it, is mingled with the keenest sympathy for Leonato as well as for Hero. I never knew exactly for which of the two my sympathy should most be shown, and I found myself by the side now of the one, now of the other.

Hero had her friends, her attendants round her ; but the kind uncle and guardian stands alone. Strangely enough, his brother Antonio, who plays a prominent part afterwards, is not at the wedding.

Beatrice's blood is all on fire at the disgrace thus brought upon her family and herself. When she hears the vile slander supported by Don Pedro ; and when Don John, that sour-visaged hypocrite whom she dislikes by instinct, with insolent cruelty throws fresh reproaches upon the fainting Hero, her eye falls on Benedick, who stands apart bewildered, looking on the scene with an air of manifest distress. In that moment, as I think, Beatrice makes up her mind that he shall be her cousin's champion. Were she not a woman, she would herself enter the lists to avenge the wrong ; since she cannot do this directly, she will do it indirectly by enlisting this new-found lover in her cause. How happy a coincidence it is, that Hero has so lately brought the fact of Benedick's devotion to her knowledge ! All remembrance of the harsh, the unkind accusations against herself with which the information was mixed up, has vanished from her mind. It was Hero who revealed to her the unsuspected love of Benedick,—at least its earnestness and depth,—and Hero shall be the first to benefit by it.

Benedick is so present to her thoughts, that when Hero faints in her arms, she calls to him, as well as to Leonato and the Friar, to come to her assistance. "Help, uncle ! Hero ! why, Hero ! Uncle ! Signor Benedick ! Friar !" Nor is he unmoved by what he has noted in Beatrice. Her deep emotion has touched him, and he begins to waver in his belief in the charge against Hero when he hears Beatrice exclaim, with a voice resonant with the energy of assured conviction, "O, on my soul, my cousin is belied !" He is not disinclined to accept the Friar's suggestion that "there is some strange misprision in the princes," and his instinct at once leads him to suspect that they have been the dupes of Don John.

"Two of them have the very bent of honour ;
And if their wisdom be misled in this,
The practice of it lives in John the bastard,
Whose spirits toil in frame of villainies."

Possessed as Benedick was with this idea of the man, it is obvious that, if his friends had taken him into their counsels, they would never have fallen into Don John's toils. Benedick's words were, no doubt, the echo of Beatrice's own thought. She would be grateful for them, and still more for the tone and manner of his parting speech to Leonato, so well fitted as these are to raise him in her esteem :—

“Signor Leonato, let the friar advise you :
And though you know my inwardness and love
Is very much unto the Prince and Claudio,
Yet, by mine honour, I will deal in this
As secretly and justly as your soul
Should with your body.”

What a conflict of strong emotions used to come over me when acting this scene ! It begins solemnly yet happily ; but oh, how soon all is changed ! One may imagine that to the marriage of the daughter of the Governor of Messina the whole nobility of the place would be invited. Claudio, we have been told, has an uncle living in Messina. This uncle, with all Claudio's kinsfolk, would be present, and the people of the city would naturally throng to the ceremony. Think what it was for the bride to be brought to shame before such an assemblage,—to be given back into her father's hands, and branded with unchastity ! What consternation to even the mere lookers-on—what dismay to those more directly concerned ! Hero is at first so stunned, so bewildered, so unable to realise what is meant by the accusation, that she cannot speak. When Claudio, assuming conscious guilt from her silence, went on with his charge, I could hardly keep still. My feet tingled, my eyes flashed lightning upon the princes and Claudio. Oh that I had been her brother, her male cousin, and not a powerless woman ! How I looked around in quest of help, and gladly saw Benedick withdrawn from the rest ! And how shame seemed piled on shame when that hateful Prince John, as he left the scene, said to the victim of his villainy—

“Thus, pretty lady,
I am sorry for thy much misgovernment.”

Oh for a flight of deadly arrows to send after him ! Then

Claudio's parting speech, with its flowery sentimentalism, so out of place in one who had played so merciless a part, sickened me with contempt.

How gladly I saw these shallow maligners disappear! Something must now be learned or done to clear away their slander. I felt with what chagrin Beatrice, when asked, was obliged to confess that last night she was not by the side of Hero—

“Although, until last night
I have this twelvemonth been her bedfellow.”

And yet how simple to myself was the explanation! Each had to commune with herself,—Hero on the serious step she was taking on the morrow—a step requiring “many orisons to move the heavens to smile upon her state;” and Beatrice, to think on what had been revealed to her of her own shortcomings, as well as of Benedick's undreamed-of attachment to herself. At such a time hours of perfect rest and solitary meditation would be welcome and needful to them both.

But Beatrice is no dreamer. The Friar's plan of giving out that Hero is dead, and so awakening Claudio's remorse, will not wipe out the wrong done to her cousin or the indignity offered to her kin. Therefore she lets her friends retire, lingering behind, to the surprise, possibly, of some who might expect that she would go with them to comfort Hero. She is bent on finding for her a better comfort than lies in words. Benedick, she feels sure, will remain if she does. And he, how could he do otherwise? This beautiful woman, whom he has hitherto known all joyousness, and seeming indifference to the feelings of others, has revealed herself under a new aspect, and one that has drawn him towards her more than he has ever been drawn before towards woman. He has noted how all through this terrible scene she has been the only one to stand by, to defend, to try to cheer the slandered Hero. Her courage and her tenderness have roused the chivalry of his nature. So deeply is he moved, that I believe, even if he had not previously been influenced by what he had heard of Beatrice's love, he would from that time have been her devoted lover and servant.

There should be tenderness in his voice as he accosts her.

"Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?" But it is only when she hears him say, "Surely, I do believe your fair cousin is wronged," that she dashes her tears aside, and can give voice to the thought that has for some time been uppermost in her mind.

"Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her !

Bene. Is there any way to show such friendship ?

Beat. A very even way, but no such friend.

Bene. May a man do it ?

Beat. It is a man's office, but not yours."

These words are not to be regarded, as by some they have been, as spoken in Beatrice's usually sarcastic vein. She only means that, being neither a kinsman, nor in any way connected with Hero's family, he cannot step forward to do her right. In this sense the words are understood by Benedick, who takes the most direct way of removing the difficulty by the avowal of his love. "I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?" After what she has overheard, this makes her smile, but it causes her no surprise. With the thought of Hero's vindication uppermost in her heart, what can she do but answer Benedick's avowal by her own? And yet to make it is by no means easy, as we see by her words, somewhat in the old vein:—

"As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you" (half confessing, and then withdrawing),—"but believe me not, and yet I lie not" (again yielding, and again falling back). "I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing."

To extricate herself from her embarrassment she turns away from the subject with the words, spoken with tremulous emotion, "I am sorry for my cousin." But Benedick is impatient for a clearer assurance. Observe how skilfully, even while she humours him, she leads him on to the point on which she has set her mind:—

"*Bene.* By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

Beat. Do not swear by it, and eat it.

Bene. I will swear by it that you love me ; and I will make him eat it that says I love not you.

Beat. Will you not eat your word ?

Bene. With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.

Beat. Why, then, Heaven forgive me !

Bene. What offence, sweet Beatrice ?

Beat. You have stayed me in a happy hour ; I was about to protest I loved you.

Bene. And do it with all thy heart.

Beat. I love you with so much of my heart, that none is left to protest."

And now that their mutual confessions have been so wittily and earnestly given, Beatrice recurs to what she has never for a moment forgotten,—the wrongs of her cousin, the outraged honour of the house of which she is herself a scion, the stain on its escutcheon. These must be avenged, and, if Benedick indeed loves her, it must be he who shall stand forth as the avenger,—for, as her accepted lover, that will be his "office." So when he says, "Come, bid me do any thing for thee!" in a breath she exclaims, "Kill Claudio!" This demand, spoken with an intensity which leaves no room to doubt that she is thoroughly in earnest, staggers Benedick. Claudio is his chosen friend, they have just gone through the perils of war together, and he replies, "Ha! not for the wide world!" "You kill me to deny; farewell," says Beatrice, and is about to leave him. In vain he importunes her to remain; and now he is made to see indeed the strength and earnestness of her nature. All the pent-up passion, that has shaken her during the previous scene, breaks out:—

"*Beat.* In faith, I will go.

Bene. We'll be friends first.

Beat. You dare easier be friends with me than fight with mine enemy.

Bene. Is Claudio thine enemy?

Beat. Is he not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What! bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour,—O Heaven, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place!

Bene. Hear me, Beatrice;—

Beat. Talk with a man out of a window? A proper saying!

Bene. Nay, but Beatrice;—

Beat. Sweet Hero!—She's wronged, she's slandered, she's undone.

Bene. Beat—

Beat. Princes and Counties! Surely a princely testimony, a good Count-Confess, a sweet gallant surely! O that I were a man for his sake! or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too. He is now as valiant as Hercules, that only tells a lie and swears it! I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving."

In her anger and distress Beatrice will not, cannot listen to what Benedick would say. At last he has a chance, when her tears are streaming, and her invectives are exhausted. "By this hand, I love thee!" he says, and he has been loving her more and more all through her burst of generous and eloquent indignation. "Use it for my love," she replies, still quivering with emotion, "some other way than swearing by it!" Then with all seriousness he asks her, "Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?" As serious and solemn is her answer, "Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul!" His rejoinder is all she could desire:—

"Enough, I am engaged; I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. As you hear of me, so think of me. Go, comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead. And so, farewell."

And so they part, each with a much higher respect for the other than before. Thanks to the poet's skill, the trouble that has fallen on Leonato's house has served to bind them to each other by the strongest tie, and to make their mutual regard and ultimate union only in the very slightest degree dependent on the plot devised by their friends.

It has been, I know, considered by some critics a blemish in Beatrice, that at such a moment she should desire to risk her lover's life. How little can such critics enter into her position, or understand the feelings by which a noble woman would in such circumstances be actuated! What she would have done herself, had she been a man, in order to punish the traducer of her kinswoman and bosom friend, and to vindicate the family honour, she has a right to expect her engaged lover will do for her. Her own honour, as one of the family, is at stake; and what woman of spirit would think so meanly of her lover as to doubt his readiness to risk his life in such a cause? The days of chivalry were not gone in Shakespeare's time; neither, I trust and believe, are they gone now. I am confident that all women who are worthy of a brave man's love will understand and sympathise with the feeling that animates Beatrice. Think of the wrong done to Hero,—the unnecessary aggravation of it

by choosing such a moment for publishing what Beatrice knows to be a vile slander! Benedick adopts her conviction, and, having adopted it, the course she urges is the one he must himself have taken. Could he leave it to the only male members of his adopted family, Leonato and Antonio, two elderly men, to champion the kinswoman of the lady of his love?

The manner in which he bears himself in the scene where he challenges Count Claudio proves that, under the gaiety of his general demeanour, lies, just as in Beatrice, a high and earnest and generous spirit. In parting from her he had said, "As you hear of me, so think of me." Had she seen with what dignity and quiet courage he meets the gibes and sarcasms of Don Pedro and Claudio, her heart must have gone out towards him with its inmost warmth. How much it cost him to renounce their friendship is very delicately shown. He has heard, by the way, that Don John has fled from Messina,—an incident calculated to strengthen his suspicions that it was he who had hatched the plot against Hero. But however this may be, they are not without reproach; so, turning to Don Pedro, he says:—

"My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you. I must discontinue your company. Your brother, the bastard, is fled from Messina. You have, among you, killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lackbeard there, he and I shall meet; and, till then, peace be with him."

Knowing that Beatrice will be all impatience to learn what has passed between himself and Claudio, Benedick hastens to seek her. He longs to be again with her, for he is by this time "horribly in love," as he said he would be. Not Leander, he tells us, nor Troilus, nor "a whole bookful of these quondam carpet-mongers, whose names yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse, were ever so truly turned over and over as my poor self in love." When Beatrice hears from Margaret that he desires speech of her, how readily does she answer to the summons! Once fairly satisfied that Claudio has undergone Benedick's challenge, her heart is lightened, and she can afford to resume some of her natural gaiety, and let herself be wooed. Then follows the charming dialogue in which the problem how they came to fall in love with each other is discussed. How

much there is here for the actress to express ! What pretty sarcasms and humorous sadness !—quite impossible to explain in words.

Bene. And, I pray thee now, tell me for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me ?

Beat. For them all together ; which maintained so politic a state of evil that they will not admit any good part to intermingle with them. But for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me ?

Bene. 'Suffer love' ? A good epithet ! I do suffer love, indeed, for I love thee against my will.

Beat. In spite of your heart, I think. Alas, poor heart ! If you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours ; for I will never love that which my friend hates. . . .

Bene. And now tell me, how doth your cousin ?

Beat. Very ill.

Bene. And how do you ?

Beat. Very ill too.

Bene. Serve Heaven, love me, and mend ! There will I leave you too, for here comes one in haste."

This is Ursula with the tidings that the plot against Hero has been unmasked, "the Prince and Claudio mightily abused, and Don John, the author of all, fled and gone." "Will you go hear this news, signor ?" says Beatrice. His rejoinder shows him all the happy lover. "I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thine eyes ; and, moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's." How quaintly comes in the "moreover" here !

When we see them again, they are with Leonato, Hero, and the others, who are met to receive Don Pedro and Claudio, and to seal the reconciliation which has been arranged by the marriage of Claudio with the lady whom he believes to be Hero's cousin. Marriage being in the air, Benedick has decided that the good friar shall have double duty to perform on the occasion. Leonato's consent to his wedding Beatrice is granted freely ; and in giving it he bewilders Benedick by obscure references to the plot for bringing the two together. Before an explanation can be given, the Prince and Claudio arrive. Although well pleased that he is no longer required to call his old friend to account, Benedick takes care to show, by his coldness and reserve, that he considers their behaviour to have been unjustifiable, even had

the story been true which Don John had beguiled them into believing. When the Prince rallies him about his "February face," he makes no rejoinder. But when Claudio, with infinite bad taste, at a moment when his mind should have been full of the gravest thoughts, attacks him in the same spirit, Benedick turns upon him with caustic severity. The entrance of Hero, with her ladies, masked, arrests what might have grown into hot words. Hero is given to Claudio, and accepts him with a ready forgiveness, which, I feel very sure, Beatrice's self-respect, under similar circumstances, would not have permitted her to grant. Such treatment as Claudio's would have chilled all love within her. She would never have trusted as her husband the man who had allowed himself to be so easily deceived, and who had openly shamed her before the world. Hero, altogether a feebleness of nature, neither looks so far into the future, nor feels so intensely what has happened in the past. But, to my thinking, her prospect of lasting happiness with the credulous and vacillating Claudio is somewhat doubtful.

I have no misgivings about the future happiness of Benedick and Beatrice, even although they learn how they have been misled into thinking that each was dying for the other, and up to the moment of going to the altar keep up their witty struggles to turn the tables on each other. How delightful is the last glimpse we get of them! Beatrice, to tease Benedick, has been holding back among the other ladies, when he expects that she would be ready to go with him to the altar; and when at last, fairly puzzled, he asks, "Which is Beatrice?" and she unmask, with the words, "What is your will?" he inquires, with an air of surprise, "Do not you love me?" What follows gives us once more the bright, joyous, brilliant Beatrice of the early scenes:—

Beat. Why, no! No more than reason.

Bene. Why, then, your uncle, the Prince, and Claudio, have been deceived; they swore you did.

Beat. Do not you love me?

Bene. Troth, no! No more than reason.

Beat. Why, then, my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula, are much deceived, for they did swear you did.

Bene. They swore that you were almost sick for me.

Beat. They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

Bene. 'Tis no such matter :—Then you do not love me?

Beat. No, truly, but in friendly recompense."

And they break away from each other, as if all were over between them. But when their love-sonnets each to the other are produced by Claudio and Hero, there can be but one end. Still, however, the war of wit goes on :—

"*Bene.* A miracle ! here's our own hands against our hearts ! Come, I will have thee ; but, by this light, I take thee for pity !

Beat. I would not deny you ;—but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion ; and, partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption."

Beatrice, as usual, has the best of it in this encounter, but Benedick is too happy to care for such defeat. He knows he has won her heart, and that it is a heart of gold. He can therefore well afford to smile at the epigrams of "a college of wit-crackers," and the quotation against himself of his former smart sayings about lovers and married men. His home, I doubt not, will be a happy one—all the happier because Beatrice and he have each a strong individuality, with fine spirits and busy brains, which will keep life from stagnating. They will always be finding out something new and interesting in each other's character. As for Beatrice, at least, one feels sure that Benedick will have a great deal to discover and to admire in her as he grows to know her better. She will prove the fitness of her name as Beatrice (the giver of happiness), and he will be glad to confess himself blest indeed (*Benedictus*) in having won her.

One might go on writing of this delightful play for ever. But it is not for me to go further into its merits. Such criticism has, I dare say, been often written by abler hands. I have but to do with Beatrice, and I can only hope that in impersonating her I have given one-half the pleasure to my audience that I have had in taking upon me her nature for the time. Such representations were to me a pure holiday. However tired I might be when the play began, the pervading joyousness of her character soon took hold of me, and bore me delightedly on. The change to this bright, high-spirited, gallant-hearted lady from the more soul-absorbing and pathetic

heroines which on most occasions I had to represent, was welcome to my often wearied spirits as a breeze from the sea.

I have told you of my first performance of Beatrice. Before I conclude, let me say a word as to my last. It was at Stratford-upon-Avon, on the opening, on 23rd of April 1879 (Shakespeare's birthday), of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. I had watched with much interest the completion of this most appropriate tribute to the memory of our supreme poet. The local enthusiasm, which would not rest until it had placed upon the banks of his native stream a building in which his best plays might be from time to time presented, commanded my warm sympathy. It is a beautiful building; and when, standing beside it, I looked upon the church wherein all that was mortal of the poet is laid, and, on the other hand, my eyes rested on the site of New Place, where he died, a feeling more earnest, more reverential, came over me than I have experienced even in Westminster Abbey, in Santa Croce, or in any other resting-place of the mighty dead. It was a deep delight to me to be the first to interpret on that spot one of my great master's brightest creations. Everything conspired to make the occasion happy. From every side of Shakespeare's county, from London, from remote provinces, came people to witness that performance. The characters were well supported, and the fact that we were acting in Shakespeare's birthplace, and to inaugurate his memorial theatre, seemed to inspire us all. I found my own delight doubled by the sensitive sympathy of my audience. Every turn of playful humour, every flash of wit, every burst of strong feeling told; and it is a great pleasure to me to think, that on that spot and on that occasion I made my last essay to present a living portraiture of the Lady Beatrice.

The success of this performance was aided by the very judicious care which had been bestowed upon all the accessories of the scene. The stage, being of moderate size, admitted of no elaborate display. But the scenes were appropriate and well painted, the dresses were well chosen, and the general effect was harmonious—satisfying the eye, without distracting the spectator's mind from the dialogue and the play of character. It was thus possible for the actors to engage the close attention of

the audience, and to keep it. This consideration seems to me now to be too frequently overlooked.

The moment the bounds of what is sufficient for scenic illustration are overleaped, a serious wrong is, in my opinion, done to the actor, and, as a necessary consequence, to the spectator also. With all good plays this must, in some measure, be the case; but where Shakespeare is concerned, it is so in a far greater degree. How can actor or actress hope to gain that hold upon the attention of an audience by which it shall be led to watch, step by step, from the first scene to the last, the development of a complex yet harmonious character, or the links of a finely adjusted plot, if the eye and ear are being overfed with gorgeous scenery, with dresses extravagant in cost, and not unfrequently quaint even to grotesqueness in style, or by the bustle and din of crowds of people, whose movements unsettle the mind and disturb that mood of continuous observation of dialogue and expression, without which the poet's purpose can neither be developed by the performer nor appreciated by his audience?

For myself, I can truly say I would rather the *mise en scène* should fall short of being sufficient, than that it should be overloaded. However great the strain—and I have too often felt it—of so engaging the minds of my audience as to make them forget the poverty of the scenic illustration, I would rather at all times have encountered it, than have had to contend against the influences which withdraw the spectator's mind from the essentials of a great drama to dwell upon its mere adjuncts. When Juliet is on the balcony, it is on her the eye should be riveted. It should not be wandering away to the moonlight, or to the pomegranate-trees of Capulet's garden, however skilfully counterfeited by the scene-painter's and the machinist's skill. The actress who is worthy to interpret that scene requires the undivided attention of her audience. I cite this as merely one of a host of illustrations that have occurred to my mind in seeing the lavish waste of merely material accessories upon the stage in recent years. How often have I wished that some poetic spirit had been charged with the task of fitting the framework to the picture, which would have kept the resources

of the painter's and costumier's art subordinate to the poet's design, and have furnished a harmonious and complete yet unobtrusive background for the play of character, emotion, passion, humour, and imagination, which it was his object to set before us!

Of course there are plays where very much must depend upon the setting in which they are placed. Who that saw it, for example, can ever forget Stanfield's scene in *Acis and Galatea*, when produced by Mr Macready? The eye never wearied of resting upon it, nor the ear of listening to the rippling murmur of the waves as they gently washed up and broke upon the shore of that sun-illumined sea. Such a background enriched the charm of even Händel's music, and blended delightfully with the movements of the nymphs and shepherds by whom the business of the scene was carried on.

Nor, as I have been told, was his revival of the *Comus* less admirable. You may have seen it, dear Mr Ruskin; and, if you have, you can judge of its merits far better than I. For as I acted "the Lady," I can, of course, speak only of the scenes in which she took part. These impressed me powerfully, and helped my imagination as I acted. The enchanted wood was admirably presented, with its dense, bewildering maze of trees, so easy to be lost in, so difficult to escape from, with the fitful moonlight casting deep shadows, and causing terrors to the lonely, bewildered girl, whose high trust and confidence in Supreme help alone keep her spirits from sinking under the wild "fantasies" that throng into her memory, "of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire." It seemed to me the very place the poet must have pictured to himself. Not less so appeared to me the Hall of Comus—so far as I could see it from the enchanted chair, in which the Lady sits spell-bound. It was a kind of Aladdin's garden, all aglow with light and colour. And then the rabble-rout, so gay, so variously clad, some like Hebes, some like hags; figures moving to and fro, some beautiful as Adonis, others like Fauns, and bearded Satyrs. Add to this the weird fascination of the music, the rich melody, the rampant joyousness, the tipsy jollity! All served to quicken in me the feeling with which the poet has

inspired the lonely "Lady," when she sees herself, without means of escape, surrounded by a rabble-rout full of wine and riot, and abandoned to shameless revelry. I lost myself in the reality of the situation, and found the poet's words flow from me as though they had sprung from my own heart. The blandishments of Comus's rhetoric, enforced with all the fervour and persuasiveness of delivery of which Mr Macready was master, seemed as it were to give the indignant impulse needed to make the Lady break her silence:—

"I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
 In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler
 Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,
 Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.
 To him that dares
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
 Against the sun-clad Power of chastity,
 Fain would I something say ; yet to what end ?

 Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric,
 That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence :
 Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced ;
 Yet, should I try, the uncontrollèd worth
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
 That dumb things should be moved to sympathise,
 And the brute earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
 Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,
 Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head !"

I could never speak these lines without a thrill that seemed to dilate my whole frame, and to give an unwonted fulness and vibration to the tones of my voice. Given, as they were, with intense earnestness, they no doubt impressed the actors of the rabble-rout, and made them feel with Comus, when he says—

"She fables not ; I feel that I do fear
 Her words set off by some superior power."

It was somewhat difficult for me to speak the lines, with my whole frame thrilling, yet unable to move a muscle, for the Lady is bound by a spell that paralyses all her limbs. It was a good experience for me, for at that time I was rather given to redundancy of action. One of the most difficult things to acquire in

the technical part of the actor's art is repose of manner,—to be able, in fact, to stand still, and yet be undergoing and expressing the strongest mental emotion. What the effect may have been upon the audience I do not know; but the revellers near my chair upon the stage told me, the morning after the first representation, that they were struck with awe; that my whole appearance seemed to become so completely transfigured under the influence of my emotion, that they would not have been amazed if the chair with the Lady in it had been swept upwards out of sight to some holier sphere.

Here was a case in which the poet's purpose was aided by the skilful use of scenic adjuncts, without which the performer could not hope to produce the desired impression on the minds of the spectators. I can easily imagine other situations where they are of the greatest value. Indeed I can vividly recall, as the very perfection of scenic illustration, *Henry V.* and *King John*, as they were produced by Mr Macready at Drury Lane. In these revivals, as they were called, the predominating mind of a man who knew the due proportion to be preserved in such matters, so as not to drown but to heighten the dramatic interest, was conspicuously apparent. In plays of this class, moreover, fulness of scenic illustration is appropriate, and in skilful hands it is never allowed to place the actors at a disadvantage. But, as a rule, it seems to me that in dramas of "high action and high passion," such things ought to be sparingly applied. The aim should be, while keeping scenic accessories in stern subordination, to economise neither pains nor money in getting every character acted with all the finish that trained ability and conscientious care can give.

Foremost of all, care should be taken that the actors of all grades have been educated to speak blank verse correctly,—to know the laws of its construction,—and while giving the meaning, to give the music of it also. It is sad to see the reckless ignorance on all these points which now prevails, and to note to what a level of feebleness and commonplace the representation of Shakespeare has—with some notable exceptions—been reduced by that nerveless and colourless thing, mistakenly called "natural acting." Thus it is that Shakespeare's plays are continually re-

produced with their very essence left out, unheeded by the actors, and, alas! to all appearance, as little missed by the audience. Of what account is elaborate scenery, or dresses that will satisfy the most fastidious archæologist, if those who wear the one or move about in the other are untrue to the characters they profess to represent, and dead to the significance and the beauty of the language they have to speak?

There is much talk in these days about realism, and keeping up scenic illusion. But how inconsistent with this talk is the practice, once happily confined to the Continent and the Opera-house, of calling on the performers at the end of an act or a scene—or, as sometimes happens, of the performers obtruding themselves, when there is nothing that deserves the name of a call—to bow and curtsy to the audience! Surely, just in proportion as the acting has been of a quality to excite genuine enthusiasm, is it unmeet that the effect produced should be disturbed by the actor's personality being interposed between one scene and another. How offensive to right feeling, as well as to every rule of art, it is, for example, to see Claude Melnotte lead on Pauline, when the curtain has just descended on their separation, she in despair and fainting in her parents' arms, he rushing away to "redeem his honour" as a soldier, with the prospect that there "shall not be a forlorn-hope without him": or, more intolerable still, where Juliet has taken the potion, been mourned over by her kindred as dead, and Romeo is, as we think, far away in Mantua, to see her advance hand in hand with him at the end of the act in answer to the summons of the unthinking few! Who can care what becomes of them after? The spell is broken, the interest destroyed.

For myself, I can truly say that I never cared for the character I was representing, after having been forced to yield to a call during the progress of the play. On the occasions when the long-continued and not-to-be-silenced clamour of the audience left me no choice, and I have gone before them (I fear very ungraciously), I have never been the same afterwards,—never able to lose myself in full measure in the illusion of the story,—never again for that night been the same Pauline, Rosalind, or whatever else I was acting, that I was before this interruption. It

was ever my desire to forget my audience. Little did they, who only meant kindness, know how much they took from my power of working out my conceptions when they forced me in this way out of my dream-world.

When the play is over, when the picture is, as it were, complete, and the character assumed has been laid down, there is something to be said in favour of a recall; for, when genuine and general, it may be a natural expression of the sympathy—and, may I say, gratitude?—of the audience. Such calls as these, in the days not very remote, when they sprang only from an irresistible feeling in the whole audience, were a distinction. Now, from being far too common and too indiscriminately given, they have lost this character. Having lost it, any inspiring influence which they may once have had upon the actor has necessarily passed away, and he can only look upon being summoned to appear before the curtain as a very irksome concession to a meaningless custom, which, if he could, he would be glad to avoid. It lies with actors themselves, and with the public, to effect the necessary reform. But let us not hear of the importance of scenic illusion while the present system—for to a system it seems to have been reduced—is tolerated and continued.

The interest I know you, dear Mr Ruskin, feel in these questions must be my excuse for touching upon them here. May I hope that my views in regard to them, as well as my estimate of the character of Beatrice, are in harmony with yours; and that you will not think I have kept you too long “listening with all your heart” to what I have had to say?

Believe me always, with sincere esteem, most truly yours,

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

31 ONSLOW SQUARE, 6th January 1885.

To JOHN RUSKIN, Esq.

[It has pleased me greatly to read, in a letter (27th February 1885) to Sir Theodore Martin from M. Regnier, formerly the well-known and distinguished member of the Comédie Française, a warm approval of my remarks in the preceding paragraphs upon certain characteristics of the contemporary stage:—

“Quant aux critiques,” he writes, “que Lady Martin fait de ces orgies de mise en scène, qui étouffent la pensée du poète sous le prétexte de la mieux mettre en lumière ; quant à ces rappels idiots des acteurs pendant le cours d’une représentation, quant à toutes ces extravagances engendrées par la vanité des acteurs ou la cupidité des directeurs, je les approuve toutes, et je dis comme un des médecins de M. de Pourceaugnac : ‘Manibus et pedibus descendo in tuam sententiam.’ Ce Latin de cuisine me fait souvenir qu’un temps ou l’on jouait à Rome Plaute, Térence, et les grands tragiques, Horace, que vous connaissez si bien, a dit quelque part ; que les plus beaux vers du monde sont mis en déroute par un passage de chevaux et d’ours traversant la scène.¹ C’est ce qui se fait encore aujourd’hui.”]

¹ Horace, Epistles II. 1, lines 184-186.

IX.

HERMIONE

IX.

HERMIONE.

“How may full-sail’d verse express,
How may measured words adore
The full-flowing harmony
Of thy swan-like stateliness?”

DEAR LORD TENNYSON,—

YOU looked more than kindly on my attempts to describe what was in my mind as to some of Shakespeare’s women, in the days when it was my privilege to impersonate them upon the stage. Now you no less kindly tell me, that you will be glad to hear what I have to say about a near relation of theirs—the noble Hermione of *The Winter’s Tale*.

I remember when, at the conclusion of my letter on Imogen, I gave expression to my idea that she was not likely long to survive the cruel strain upon mind and body to which she had been subjected, you wrote to me that you liked to think just the contrary, and that she lived long and happily ever after with her Posthumus, just like all the good people in the fairy tales. Do not fear that I shall distress you with any such conjectures about the wife of Leontes, although she of a truth was made more unhappy

“Than history can pattern, though devised
And play’d to take spectators.”

In accordance with his wellnigh uniform practice, Shakespeare

borrowed the main incidents of this play from one of the popular stories of his day. Strangely enough, in this instance he had recourse to a tale by Robert Greene, the dramatist and romance writer, who in 1592 had attacked him as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers," and "in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a countrie." How indifferent the poet was to charges of this nature is shown in the well-known sonnet called "The Poet Ape" by Ben Jonson, which is commonly believed to have been directed against Shakespeare, before the days when Jonson profited by his friendship, and grew familiar with his genius. "Now grown," the sonnet says,

"To a little wealth and credit in the scene,
He takes up all, make's each man's wit his own,
And, told of this, he slights it."

Well might he slight such attacks, knowing how much that was absolutely his own he put into every play which he recast, or for which he had taken hints from stories told by other men. So far from bearing Shakespeare a grudge for using his tale, 'Pandosto, or the Triumphs of Time,' as the foundation of *The Winter's Tale*, Greene might rather have been grateful to him for so beautifying it with his own feathers that he redeemed the work, excellent of its kind though it is, from the oblivion into which otherwise it would probably have fallen.

Greene had long been dead, however, before *The Winter's Tale* was written. For there is no record of it before 1611, when Dr Simon Forman mentions in his Diary that he saw it acted at the Globe Theatre on the 15th of May in that year. Thus it may fairly be assumed that it was one of the poet's latest works, if indeed this were not clear, from the internal evidence of matured power in every element of thought, pathos, humour, and dramatic construction, for which in their combination Shakespeare in his later works stands without a peer.

To you, who have done for the characters in Sir Thomas Malory's 'History of King Arthur' what Shakespeare did for the tales from which he took suggestions for so many of his plots, it would be idle to dwell upon the folly of disputing his claim to originality because others had gone over the same ground before. Hundreds, thousands, go over the same ground in a beautiful

country, who are dead to its beauties, until some man with eyes to see, and a soul to illuminate the impressions made upon him by what he sees, calls attention to those beauties, and, on the canvas, or in words that are pictures, glorifies them with

“The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the poet’s dream.”

It is the same with the heroes and heroines of history and fiction. It is only the great poet who sees what scope they offer for inspiring them with life, and for placing them under conditions in which character, emotion, and passion may be portrayed under ideal forms, but still with a truth to nature which makes them even more real, more intimately familiar to us, than the people whom we have longest known.

So is it that in ‘The Idylls of the King’ we find such pictures of true knightliness, tenderness, beauty, and pathos, as are nowhere to be found in the wild, quaint, but assuredly tedious and not unfrequently coarse incidents and legends which are chronicled in Sir Thomas Malory’s book.

No better illustration can be found of how the shaping spirit of imagination turns prose into poetry than by comparing *The Winter’s Tale* with Greene’s ‘Pandosto,’ or, as in later editions it was called, ‘The Pleasant History of Dorastus and Fawnia.’ In both we find the sudden outbreak in Pandosto (the Leontes of the play) of an insane jealousy of his lifelong friend Egistus (Polixenes), the flight of Egistus with the king’s cup-bearer Franion (Camillo), the sending away by Pandosto of the new-born babe to be destroyed, the trial of Bellaria (Hermione), the judgment of the oracle in her favour, and the death of her son Gerinter (Mamillius). But the Bellaria of the story dies, and the subsequent history of her daughter Fawnia (Perdita), and Dorastus (Florizel), in other respects much the same as in the play, is made peculiarly unpleasant by the passion Pandosto conceives for his own child, when she seeks refuge with her lover at his Court, and the winding up of the story with his suicide in a fit of remorse for having entertained this passion. Obviously an impracticable story this for the purpose of a play! But how skillfully has Shakespeare bridged over all difficulty by the invention

of incidents, and the introduction of characters—the wittiest of rogues, Autolycus, one of them—which give life, coherence, and probability to the action of the play, while they enable him to bring it, as with a strain of noble music, to a perfect close, by making Hermione live to see her daughter restored to her arms and to be herself reunited to her husband!

So much for the outlines of the plot; but it is in the delineation of the characters that the marked difference is seen between Greene, the man of talent, and Shakespeare, the myriad-minded man of genius. How clear the lines with which they are drawn; with what precision and delicacy of touch are they individualised; what wonders of light and shade are shown in their grouping; what richness of imagination, what power, what beauty, what pathos, what humour in what they have to say!

Shakespeare shows his usual constructive skill in the very first scene, by bringing into prominence in the dialogue between Camillo and Archidamus the remarkable attachment between Leontes and Polixenes, and the winning ways of Hermione's little son Mamillius. In speaking of the affection of the two kings, Camillo says, "They were trained together in their childhood. Since their more mature dignities, and royal necessities, made separation of their society," they had kept the intimacy unbroken by such interchange of letters and of gifts, "that they have seemed to be together, though absent. The heavens continue their loves!" To which Archidamus replies: "I think there is not in the world either malice or matter to alter it." Then he goes on to praise Leontes' young son: "You have an unspeakable comfort of your young prince Mamillius; it is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note."

Here two notes are struck which reverberate in the heart, when these bright anticipations are soon afterwards turned to anguish and dismay by the wholly unexpected jealous frenzy of Leontes. They prepare us for seeing Leontes in the next scene urging his friend, who has already lingered nine months at the Sicilian Court, still further to prolong his stay. Hermione is by, but she is silent, until Leontes, who appears surprised at her silence, says to her, "Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you!"

Thus appealed to, she shows that her intercession had been reserved until her husband had put still harder pressure upon their guest.

"I had thought, sir, to have held my peace until
You had drawn oaths from him not to stay. You, sir,
Charge him too coldly. Tell him, you are sure
All in Bohemia's well. . . . Say this to him,
He's beat from his best ward.

Leon.

Well said, Hermione!"

Then note how the mother, to whom her own boy was inexpressibly dear, speaks in her illusion to the son of Polixenes, of whom no word has hitherto been said:—

"To tell, he longs to see his son, were strong;
But let him say so then, and let him go;
But let him swear so, *and he shall not stay*,
We'll thwack him hence with distaffs."

.

Polixenes does not avail himself of the plea thus suggested, and Hermione continues—

"When at Bohemia
You take my lord, I'll give him my commission
To let him there a month behind the gest
Prefix'd for's parting."

Then, that Leontes may not think she could bear his absence lightly, she turns to him, saying—

"Yet, good deed, Leontes,
I love thee not a jar of the clock behind
What lady-she her lord."

A sweet assurance that might have warmed the coldest husband's heart! And with the winning smile playing about her sensitive mouth, and the loving light in her eyes,—those "full eyes," which live in Leontes' memory long years after, as "stars, stars, and all else dead coals,"—she turns to Polixenes with the words, "You'll stay?" Hard it must have been for him to answer, "No, madam!" But she is not to be put off, for now she is intent on carrying her point, and so accomplishing what she believes to be her husband's earnest desire.

Her. Nay, but you will?

Pol.

I may not, verily.

Her. Verily!

You put me off with limber vows; but I,
Though you would seek to unsphere the stars with oaths,
Should yet say, 'Sir, no going!' Verily,
You shall not go; a lady's 'verily' is
As potent as a lord's."

Finding Polixenes makes no sign of yielding, she continues—

"Will you go yet?

Force me to keep you as a prisoner,
Not like a guest; so you shall pay your fees
When you depart, and save your thanks. How say you?
My prisoner or my guest? By your dread 'Verily,'
One of them you shall be.

Pol.

Your guest, then, madam!

To be your prisoner would import offending,
Which is for me less easy to commit,
Than you to punish.

Her.

Not your jailer, then,

But your kind hostess. Come, I'll question you
Of my lord's tricks, and yours, when you were boys."

On this follows as sweet a picture of innocent boyhood as was ever painted:—

Pol.

We were, fair queen,

Two lads that thought there was no more behind
But such a day to-morrow as to-day,
And to be boy eternal.

Her. Was not my lord the verier wag of the two?

Pol. We were as twinn'd lambs, that did frisk i' the sun,
And bleat the one at the other; what we changed
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, neither dreamed
That any did. Had we pursued that life,
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher raised
With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven
Boldly, 'Not guilty!'

Her.

By this we gather,

You have tripped since."

Polixenes' first words in reply show the reverence with which the serene purity of Hermione had inspired him:—

"Oh, my most sacred lady!

Temptations have since then been born to us; for

In those unfledged days was my wife a girl ;
Your precious self had not then cross'd the eyes
Of my young playfellow."

Playfully rallying Polixenes upon the suggestion here implied, that his queen and herself have been their tempters to evil, Hermione rejoins :—

" Grace to boot !
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils. Yet, go on ;
The offences we have made you do we'll answer."

At this point Leontes breaks in with "Is he won yet?"

" *Her.* He'll stay, my lord.

Leon. At my request he would not.
Hermione, my dearest, thou ne'er spok'st
To better purpose."

Strange words from one who so directly afterwards finds cause for jealousy in the success of his wife's pleading ! Still stranger is it, and more suggestive of the disturbance already at work in the brain of Leontes, that he could possibly doubt Hermione's faith, after what she says in the dialogue that follows, in which she so sweetly challenges his remark that she had never spoken to better purpose. In acting, how much should be indicated in the tone of Hermione's "Never"? Have you forgotten, it asks, your long wooing, and the consent it at last won from me? Will not the words I then spoke rank for ever the highest in your regard? Leontes, quite taking her meaning, but liking to be entreated, only says, "Never but once." Then comes her charming rejoinder,—so pretty, so coaxing, something like Desdemona's to Othello, when pleading for a gentle answer to Cassio's suit (Act iii. sc. 3):—

" *Her.* What ! have I twice said well? When was't before?
I prithee tell me :

.
One good deed dying tongueless
Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.
Our praises are our wages : you may ride us,
With one soft kiss, a thousand furlongs, ere
With spur we heat an acre. But to the goal !
My last good deed was to entreat his stay ;

What was my first ? It has an elder sister,
 Or I mistake you : oh, would her name were Grace !
 But once before I spoke to the purpose : When ?
 Nay, let me hav't : I long.

Leon. Why, that was when
 Three crabbed months had soured themselves to death,
 Ere I could make thee open thy white hands,
 And clap thyself my love ; then did'st thou utter—
 'I am yours for ever !'

Her. It is Grace indeed.
 Why, lo you now, I have spoke to the purpose twice.
 The one for ever earn'd a royal husband,"

giving, as she speaks, her left hand with the marriage symbol upon it to Leontes. Then with the words—

"The other for some while a friend,"

she offers her right hand in token of friendship to Polixenes, who retains it while talking apart with her for a while, amusing her, we may imagine, with pleasant stories of the youthful frolics and fancies of Leontes and himself, when they were "as twinn'd lambs, that did frisk i' the sun," and making her smile in pure joyousness of heart to hear what Leontes was in the days before she knew him,—little dreaming the while, as, leaving her hand in that of Polixenes, he leads her along, that in the eyes of Leontes this natural evidence of friendship is being construed into "paddling palms and pinching fingers," and "making practised smiles as in a looking-glass."

What must have been the condition of his mind, when room could be found in it for unholy distrust of the woman who the moment before had dwelt with such loving tenderness upon the time when he wooed and won her, and this, too, in the presence of the very man whom his disordered fancy believes to have supplanted him in her affections ! A sudden access of madness can alone account for the debasing change in the nature of Leontes, who until now has shown himself not unworthy of his queen. Such inexplicable outbreaks of jealousy, I have been told, do occasionally occur in real life. While they last, the very nature of their victims is transformed, and their imagination, wholesome and cleanly till then, becomes, like that of Leontes, "foul as Vulcan's stithy."

It was easy for Greene, with the greater latitude which the narrative form allows, to lead up to and explain the ultimate explosion of Pandosto's jealousy, which had been silently growing through the protracted stay of Egistus at his Court, until at last he began to put a vile construction upon his wife's simplest acts of courtesy and hospitality. But drama allows no scope for slow development. Shakespeare has therefore dealt with Leontes as a man in whom the passion of jealousy is inherent; and shows it breaking out suddenly with a force that is deaf to reason, and which, stimulated by an imagination tainted to the core, finds evidences of guilt in actions the most innocent. How different is such a nature from Othello's! He was "not easily jealous"; but, having become "perplexed in the extreme" by Iago's perversion of circumstances innocent in themselves,—“trifles light as air,”—he loses for a while his faith in the being he loved as his very life. Even then, grief for the fall of her whom he had made his idol,—“Oh the pity of it, the pity of it, Iago!”—surges up through the wildest paroxysms of his passion. Tenderness for a beauty so exquisite that “the sense ached at it,” stays his uplifted dagger. In his mind Desdemona is, to the last, the “cunning'st pattern of excelling nature.” As the victim of craftily devised stratagem, he never himself quite forfeits our sympathy.

Of the jealousy that animates Leontes, the jealousy that needs no extraneous prompting to suspicion, Emilia, in *Othello*, gives a perfect description. In answer to the hope which she expresses to Desdemona that Othello's harsh bearing towards her is due to state affairs, and to “no conception, nor no jealous toy concerning you,” Desdemona replies, “Alas the day, I never gave him cause!” To this Emilia rejoins—

“But jealous souls will not be answered so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous, for they are jealous; 'tis a monster
Begot upon itself, born on itself.”

This is the jealousy which Shakespeare has portrayed in Leontes,—a jealousy without excuse,—cruel, vindictive, and remorseless almost beyond belief.

Othello, moreover, had been wedded, so far as we see, but a few brief weeks. He had not had time to prove how deeply

Desdemona loved him. But years of happy wedlock had assured Leontes of Hermione's affection,—years in which he had tested the inward nobility which expressed itself in that majestic bearing, of which he speaks again and again, long after he has reason to believe her to be dead. Maintaining through all her life the charm of royal graciousness and dignity, she has inspired the chivalrously enthusiastic admiration and devotion of every member of the Court; a woman, in short, with whom no derogatory thought could be associated, being, as she is described by one of them to be, “so sovereignly honourable.”

That Leontes' brain is by this time unsettled is manifest in the broken dialogue which he holds with his darling Mamillius. His altered looks and manner attract the attention of both Hermione and Polixenes. “You look,” says Hermione—

“As if you held a brow of much distraction :
Are you moved, my lord ?”

With something of the secretiveness and cunning of a man on the brink of madness, he evades the inquiry by saying that his boy's face had made him think of the days when, twenty-three years back, he was a child of the same age. Then, turning to Polixenes with seemingly all the old friendliness, he asks—

“Are you as fond of your young prince as we
Do seem to be of ours ?”

This draws from Polixenes a delightful description of the boy, whom we are afterwards to know as Florizel.

“If at home, sir,
He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter ;
Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy ;
My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all :
He makes a July's day short as December ;
And with his varying childness, cures in me
Thoughts that would thicken my blood.

Leon.
Officed with me.”

So stands this squire

With this Leontes leaves Polixenes and Hermione to what he calls their “graver steps,” while he walks away ostensibly to make sport with his boy. We know from what he says later on

that, instead of this, he is on the watch, in hopes to find in their demeanour a confirmation of his suspicions.

“I am angling now,
Though you perceive me not, how I give line.”

But with the madman's shallow cunning he enjoins Hermione, as he goes, to show how she loves himself “in our brother's welcome,” adding—

“Next to thyself and my young rover, he's
Apparent to my heart.”

Poor Hermione! How little does she dream of the canker that is even now eating away all that is noble in the character of her Leontes! Her happiness would appear to be without alloy. Blest, as she thinks herself, in her husband's love and trust; blest in a child more than usually bright, loving, and attractive; happy in the friendship of a man whose high qualities she cannot fail to admire and esteem, and whom she is enjoined by her husband to trust as a brother,—her life is already flooded with sunshine; and in her mother's heart there is still another budding hope that in the near future will complete the measure of her joy.

How swiftly all is changed! Utterly losing self-control, Leontes summons his chamber-councillor Camillo, and pours out a flood of invectives upon the queen, so gross as to provoke the rebuke—

“I would not be a stander-by, to hear
My sovereign mistress clouded so, without
My present vengeance taken. 'Shrew my heart,
You never spoke what did become you less
Than this.”

Remonstrance, however, is useless. Camillo quickly sees that his only course is to humour the passion which has suddenly transformed the master he had loved into a furious madman. Not, however, for one instant does he waver in his belief in the purity of his “dread mistress.” Thus, while making a show of consenting to the demand of Leontes that he shall poison Polixenes—a demand peculiarly shameful, as Leontes has appointed him

the cup-bearer of his guest (whom therefore he was especially bound to protect)—he does so only

“Provided, that when he's removed, your highness
Will take again your queen, as yours at first,
Even for your son's sake, and thereby, for sealing
The injury of tongues, in courts and kingdoms
Known and allied to yours.”

Leontes professes that this is his intention, adding, to deceive Camillo, “I'll give no blemish to her honour—none.” At such a crisis to gain time was everything, and with this view Camillo urges the king to show no change in his demeanour towards Polixenes and Hermione. Promising to follow his advice, Leontes goes away. Camillo, however, foresees nothing but sorrow for his beloved mistress in the future. “Oh, miserable lady!” is his first exclamation when left alone. But he has to consider his own position, and having pledged himself to the king to an act from which his soul recoils, no course is left him but to leave the country. In his present mood, Leontes, he feels, is no longer a responsible being. How baseless were his assurances that he would continue to “seem friendly” to the object of his jealousy is promptly shown upon the entry of Polixenes, who complains that Leontes has passed him without speaking, and with “such a countenance

“As he had lost some province and a region
Loved as he loves himself. Even now I met him
With customary compliment; when he,
Wafting his eyes to the contrary, and falling
A lip of much contempt, speeds from me; and
So leaves me to consider what is breeding,
That changes thus his manners.”

Urged by Polixenes to throw light, if he can, upon what has caused this sudden change, Camillo at first does no more than urge him for his own safety to leave the court at once, as he means himself to do. On being pressed to say why, he confesses to Polixenes that he has been appointed to murder him, because he is suspected by Leontes of having “touched his queen forbiddenly.” “Oh, then,” Polixenes exclaims,

“ My best blood turn
To an infected jelly ; and my name
Be yoked with his that did betray the Best ! ”

and in his every word shows how impossible it was for him ever to have entertained any feeling towards Hermione but that of reverential admiration. His instinct as a man of honour would have led him to remain and confront Leontes. But from what Camillo tells him, he sees that this course would endanger his own life, and possibly bring further indignity upon the queen. At the same time he sadly divines into what excesses of vindictive passion Leontes was likely to be driven. “ This jealousy,” he says,

“ Is for a precious creature : as she’s rare,
Must it be great ; and, as his person’s mighty,
Must it be violent ; and as he does conceive
He is dishonour’d by a man which ever
Profess’d to him, why, his revenges must
In that be made more bitter.”

Therefore, with the aid of Camillo, who escapes with him, he secretly and swiftly returns to his own kingdom of Bohemia, and sixteen years elapse before we hear of either of them again.

Meanwhile Shakespeare shows us Hermione again under an aspect that brings her home still more closely to our sympathies, while it deepens the pathos of the terrible burden that is presently to be laid upon her.

Is there, even in Shakespeare, any passage more charming in itself, or more cunningly devised to reveal to an audience the main purpose of the play, than the brief scene with which the second act opens ? The boy Mamillius, of whom Archidamus had spoken as the “ gallant child,” the “ gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into his note,” unconscious of the delicate condition of his mother, has fatigued her with his caresses and the eager importunity of his questions. “ Take the boy to you,” she says to her ladies-in-waiting,

“ He so troubles me,
'Tis past enduring.
1st Lady. Come, my gracious lord,
Shall I be your playfellow ?
Mam. No, I'll none of you.

1st Lady. Why, my sweet lord ?

Mam. You'll kiss me hard ; and speak to me as if
I were a baby still. I love you better.

2nd Lady. And why so, my lord ?

Mam. Not for because
Your brows are blacker ; yet black brows, they say,
Become some women best ; so that there be not
Too much hair there, but in a semicircle,
Or half-moon made with a pen.

2nd Lady. Who taught you this ?

Mam. I learn'd it out of women's faces."

What mother could long keep such a darling from her side ?
Hermione could not, and presently she calls him back to her
from the circle of her ladies, who have gathered round him,
delighted with his precocious prattle.

Her. Come, sir, now
I am for you again : pray you, sit by us,
And tell's a tale.

Mam. Merry, or sad, shall't be ?

Her. As merry as you will.

Mam. A sad tale's best for winter."

[in these words suggesting the name for the play, with its saddest
of tales.]

" I have one of sprites and goblins.

Her. Let's have that, good sir.
Come on, sit down. Come on, and do your best
To fright me with your sprites ; you're powerful at it.

Mam. There was a man,—

Her. Nay, come, sit down ; then on !

Mam. Dwelt by a churchyard. I will tell it softly ;
Yond crickets shall not hear it.

Her. Come on, then,
And give't me in mine ear."

But that tale is never to be told. It is arrested by the abrupt
entrance of Leontes with his suite. He has heard of the secret
departure of Polixenes and Camillo, which confirms his worst
surmises.

" Camillo was his help, his pander :
There is a plot against my life, my crown ;"

and his queen is privy to it. Turning to her in fury, he drags
Mamillius from her side :

"Give me the boy ! I am glad you did not nurse him ;
Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you
Have too much blood in him."

In complete bewilderment Hermione exclaims, "What is this? Sport?" At first she seems unable to regard Leontes as in earnest, even when his answer to her question is

"Bear the boy hence. He shall not come about her.
Away with him !"

and in the coarsest terms charges her with disloyalty to his bed. In a kind of stupor she listens to his vituperations, until he brands her, to the wonder-stricken circle of his lords, as "an adulteress." Upon this the indignant denial leaps to her lips—

"Should a villain say so,
The most replenish'd villain in the world,
He were as much more villain !"

But here she checks herself. The name of villain must not be coupled with his,—her husband, and a king,—and with a voice softened, but resolute, she adds, "You, my lord, do but mistake." Unmoved by her gentleness, Leontes reiterates his accusations with redoubled vehemence. The blood is sent back upon her heart, speaking as these do of the overthrow of the love of years in the inexplicable delusion by which he is possessed. Humiliating as her position is, thus to be reviled by her husband and before the Court, she never loses for a moment her queenly dignity and self-command. Even in the midst of her anguish, her paramount thought is for him, to whom, as he had so lately reminded her, she had vowed herself "for ever." We seem to hear the sad, calm, solemn tones of her voice as she speaks.

"How will this grieve you,
When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that
You have thus published me ! Gentle my lord,
You scarce can right me truly then, to say
You did mistake."

Insane though he is for the time, yet Leontes feels that, if she speaks true—if he should be wrong—his error would be inexorable. "No," he replies ;

"If I mistake
In these foundations that I build upon,

The centre is not big enough to bear
A school-boy's top. Away with her to prison !”

Hermione attempts no remonstrance. She accepts her fate meekly.

“There's some ill planet reigns :
I must be patient, till the heavens look
With an aspect more favourable.”

As she is about to leave, she sees the lords regarding her with mournful faces. They cannot surely believe her guilty ; yet men look for women's tears in hours of trial. She has none to give ; her heart is too “sorely charged” for that. But from her dry eyes they must draw no false conclusions. “Good my lords,” she says,

“I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are ; the want of which vain dew
Perchance shall dry your pities. But I have
That honourable grief lodged here, which burns
Worse than tears drown. Beseech you all, my lords,
With thoughts so qualified as your charities
Shall best instruct you, measure me ; and so
The king's will be performed.”

No one stirs ; and Leontes, made more and more angry and excited by her presence, says roughly, “Shall I be heard ?” Upon this Hermione, suddenly reminded by a painful throb of her impending trial, is affrighted by the thought that jailers are to be her sole attendants. Who can read without emotion what follows ?—

“Beseech your highness,
My women may be with me ; for, you see,
My plight requires it. Do not weep, good fools ;
There is no cause ; when you shall know your mistress
Has deserved prison, then abound in tears,
As I come out : this action I now go on
Is for my better grace.”

Then, bending with a low reverence to the king, she continues—

“Adieu, my lord :
I never wished to see you sorry ; now
I trust I shall.”

What a parting, what a prophecy! And in our common life to how many a sad heart does the infinite pathos of these words strike home!

No sooner has the queen withdrawn with her ladies than the lords, who have been restrained by her presence, break forth into passionate remonstrances with Leontes, heedless of his words,

“He who shall speak for her is afar off guilty,
But that he speaks.”

“Beseech your highness,” says one, “call the queen again!” and Antigonus, who is afterwards to play a material part in the story, speaks with a solemn voice of warning—

“Be certain what you do, sir; lest your justice
Prove violence; in the which three great ones suffer,
Yourself, your queen, your son.”

Later on, he points out to the king how far more seemly it would have been for him to have tested his suspicions silently before blazoning them to the world. So absolute is the belief of all the lords in the queen's innocence, that they are not deterred by the angry resistance of Leontes from loudly protesting that he is under a delusion. It is some saving grace in him that he argues the matter with them, instead of ordering them to prison for their boldness, and tells them that, while himself assured of the queen's guilt,

“Yet, for a greater confirmation,
For, in an act of this importance, 'twere
Most piteous to be wild,”

he has despatched two of the leading members of his Court to obtain the opinion of the Oracle at Delphi, “whose spiritual counsel had shall stop or spur him.” He has done this obviously not for his own satisfaction but to “give rest to the minds of others.” Neither Antigonus nor any of the lords have any misgivings as to the issue. The oracle will surely show their monarch's folly, “if the good truth were known.”

The next scene introduces us to Paulina, the wife of Antigonus, a lady of high position, who henceforth fills a most important part in the drama, and who should be impersonated in any

adequate representation of the play by an actress of the first order. She is a woman of no ordinary sagacity, with a warm heart, a vigorous brain, and an ardent temper. Her love for Hermione has its roots in admiration and reverence for all the good and gracious qualities of which the queen's daily life has given witness. She has been much about her royal mistress, and much esteemed and trusted by her. Leontes, knowing this, obviously anticipates that she will not remain quiet when she hears of the charge he has brought against the queen, and that he has thrust her into prison. Accordingly, he has given express orders that Paulina is not to be admitted to the prison, and this fresh act of cruelty she learns from the governor only when she arrives there in the hope of being some comfort to her much-wronged mistress. "Good lady," she exclaims, to herself,

"No court in Europe is too good for thee ;
What dost thou, then, in prison ?"

The privilege of access to the queen is resolutely denied to her. She prevails, however, on the governor to permit her to see the queen's chief woman, Emilia, and from her she learns that, "on her frights and griefs," Hermione has been prematurely delivered of a daughter, "a goodly babe, lusty and like to live."

"The queen receives
Much comfort in't ; says ' My poor prisoner,
I am innocent as you.' "

How Paulina's heart must have been stirred as these words brought before her the image of the forlorn mother and her child ! In hot anger she exclaims, "I dare be sworn !"—and in the words that follow shows the clear common-sense and fearless courage of which she gives remarkable proofs at a later stage. From first to last she regards the conduct of Leontes as simple madness.

"These dangerous lunes i' the king, beshrew them !
He must be told on't, and he shall : the office
Becomes a woman best. I take't upon me.
If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister,
And never to my red-looking anger be
The trumpet any more."

But here a plea that may soften the king's heart flashes upon her. If the queen will trust her with the babe, she will show it to the king, "and undertake to be her advocate to the loud'st."

"We do not know
How he may soften at the sight o' the child;
The silence often of pure innocence
Persuades, when speaking fails."

The idea of such an appeal, Emilia says, had occurred to the queen herself;

"Who, but to-day, hammered of this design,
But durst not trust a minister of honour,
Lest she should be denied."

"There is no lady living," Emilia adds, "so meet for this great errand." She anticipates "a thriving issue" for it. Presently we find that Hermione parts with her child, in the hope that the sight of its sweet face, the touch of the baby fingers, its likeness to himself—

"Although the print be little, the whole matter
And copy of the father"—

may turn his heart, and break the frightful spell by which he is mysteriously bound.

Under that spell Leontes is kept upon the rack. "Nor night nor day, no rest!" are his first words when next we see him. His thoughts are all of vengeance. "The harlot king," he says, "is quite beyond mine arm;" but Hermione is in his grasp.

"Say, that she were gone,
Given to the fire, a moiety of my rest
Might come to me again."

He has still another bitter grief, one for which he can take vengeance upon no one, neither thrust aside,—a grief which will haunt him to his grave. His boy, his darling Mamillius, is sick. "How does the boy?" he asks eagerly of an attendant whom he has summoned, who answers—

"He took good rest to-night;
'Tis hoped his sickness is discharged.
Leon. To see his nobleness!
Conceiving the dishonour of his mother,

He straight declined, droop'd, took it deeply ;
 Fastened and fixed the shame on't in himself ;
 Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,
 And downright languished. Leave me solely ; go,
 See how he fares."

But Leontes is no sooner alone than he relapses into his dreams of vengeance. In these he becomes absorbed, until his attention is aroused by the voice of Paulina in loud talk with his attendants, who are trying to keep her from making her way to him with Hermione's baby in her arms. Of all the ladies of the court she is the one he has most feared to see. "I charged thee," he says to her husband, Antigonus, "that she should not come about me. I knew she would." But neither Antigonus nor the king can shake her determination to speak her mind.

"I say, I come
 From your good queen.
Leon. Good queen !
Paul. Good queen, my lord, good queen : I say, good queen ;
 And would by combat make her good, so were I
 A man, the worst about you. . . .
 The good queen,
 For she is good, hath brought you forth a daughter ;
 Here 'tis ; commends it to your blessing.

[Laying down the child.]

In a paroxysm of rage, Leontes calls her by names the most opprobrious, orders her "out o' door," and commands Antigonus to "take up the bastard" and give it to his "crone." "For ever," she exclaims to her husband,

"Unvenerable be thy hands, if thou
 Tak'st up the princess, by that forcèd baseness
 Which he has put upon't."

Maddened still further by her indifference to his anger, Leontes exclaims—

"This brat is none of mine ;
 It is the issue of Polixenes :
 Hence with it ! And together with the dam
 Commit them to the fire ! . . .
 (To *Paulina*) I'll have thee burn'd.
Paul. I care not :
 It is an heretic that makes the fire,
 Not she which burns in't. I'll not call you tyrant ;

But this most cruel usage of your queen—
 Not able to produce more accusation
 Than your own weak-hinged fancy—something savours
 Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
 Yea, scandalous to the world.”

“Out of the chamber with her!” cries the king. Paulina, seeing that further remonstrance is impossible, retires; but not without some further words of warning. “Look to your babe, my lord; ’tis yours. Jove send her a better guiding spirit!” How dangerous, how unsafe the king’s frenzy has become, is seen in the way he turns upon Antigonus.

“Thou, traitor, hast set on thy wife to this.
 My child! Away with’t! Even thou, that hast
 A heart so tender o’er it, take it hence,
 And see it instantly consumed with fire;
 Even thou, and none but thou. Take it up straight;
 Within this hour bring me word ’tis done,
 And by good testimony, or I’ll seize thy life,
 And what thou else call’st thine. If thou refuse,
 And wilt encounter with my wrath, say so;
 The bastard’s brains with these my proper hands
 Shall I dash out. Go, take it to the fire!”

Stricken with horror, the attendant lords kneel, beseeching the king to “change this purpose,” so “horrible, so bloody.” Feeling obviously some misgiving within himself, he exclaims, “I am a feather in each wind that blows,” and calls to Antigonus:

“You, sir, come you hither!
 You, that have been so tenderly officious . . .
 To save this bastard’s life; for ’tis a bastard
 So sure as thy beard’s grey,—what will you adventure
 To save this brat’s life?

Ant. Anything, my lord,
 That my ability may undergo,
 And nobleness impose; at least thus much,
 I’ll pawn the little blood that I have left,
 To save the innocent,—anything possible.”

“It *shall* be possible!” cries Leontes, and straightway enjoins him to bear the child

“To some remote and desert place, quite out
 Of our dominions; and that there thou leave it,

Without more mercy, to its own protection
 And favour of the climate. . . .
 Where chance may nurse or end it. Take it up."

The gentle, kindly, elderly Antigonus, upon whom the plain speaking of his younger warm-tempered wife has brought this terrible task, swears to obey his sovereign's order, "Though a present death," he says, "had been more merciful"; and taking up the child, with the words,

"Come on, poor babe ;
 Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
 To be thy nurses. . . . Sir, be prosperous
 In more than this deed doth require ! And blessing
 Against this cruelty fight on thy side,
 Poor thing, condemned to loss !"

he sets out upon his cruel errand.

Scarcely has he gone when tidings arrive that Cleomenes and Dion, the messengers despatched to the Delphic Oracle, have returned, and are "hasting to the court." Now, thinks Leontes, the gods will prove him to be in the right. That their answer should be such as to stay his hand from destroying his queen he believes to be impossible. He orders, indeed, a session to be forthwith summoned—

"That we may arraign
 Our most disloyal lady ; for as she hath
 Been publicly accused, so shall she have
 A just and open trial."

But that it will result in her condemnation he is completely assured, for he adds—

"While she lives,
 My heart will be a burthen to me."

Miserable man ! He had yet to learn how much heavier a burden his heart will have to bear.

Here follows one of those exquisite scenes with which Shakespeare so often enriches his plays, in the creative exuberance of his imagination, and prompted by the subtle sense of what is wanted to put his audience in the right mood for what is next to follow. After all the prophetic vehemence of Paulina and the insane passion of Leontes, he seems to have felt that some-

thing in a gentler strain was needed to calm the emotions of his hearers, and lift them into a serener air, before showing Hermione upon her trial. This he has done by a brief dialogue between Cleomenes and Dion, which takes us with them to the temple at Delphi, chosen by Apollo as the mouthpiece of his oracles :—

Cleo. The climate's delicate ; the air most sweet ;
Fertile the isle ; the temple much surpassing
The common praise it bears.

Dion. I shall report,
For most it caught me, the celestial habits,—
Methinks I so should term them,—and the reverence
Of the grave wearers. Oh, the sacrifice !
How ceremonious, solemn, and unearthly
It was i' the offering !

Cleo. But, of all, the burst
And the ear-deafening voice o' the oracle,
Kin to Jove's thunder, so surprised my sense,
That I was nothing.

Dion. If the event o' the journey
Prove as successful to the queen,—oh, be't so !—
As it hath been to us rare, pleasant, speedy,
The time is worth the use on't.

Cleo. Great Apollo,
Turn all to the best ! These proclamations,
So forcing faults upon Hermione,
I little like.

Dion. The violent carriage of it
Will clear or end the business, when the oracle,—
Thus by Apollo's great divine seal'd up,—
Shall the contents discover, something rare
Even then will rush to knowledge. Go ! Fresh horses !
And gracious be the issue !”

How much does this scene suggest, and in such brief compass ! What a prelude, also, to the great scene, in which we are presently to see Hermione pleading her cause before the assembled judges, and all “who please to come and hear” ! This is a scene which makes a large demand upon the resources of the actress, both personal and mental. With enfeebled health, and placed in a most ignominious position, Hermione must be shown to maintain her queenly dignity, and to control her passionate emotion under an outward bearing of resigned fortitude and almost inconceivable forbearance.

In my early studies for the impersonation of Hermione, and in my acting of the character, I used to find myself imagining the procession of the queen and her suite through the streets, "i' the open air," from the prison, where she had spent the last few weeks, to the Hall of Justice. Her ladies are by her side, not weeping now, for their mistress had shown them how to bear affliction. The fragile form, the sad, far away looking eyes, the pale but lovely face, so stricken with suffering, reveal too well all that she has been passing through. Whatever impression of the queen's guilt may have been raised in the people's mind by the sudden flight of Polixenes and his followers, her look and bearing, I felt, must dispel every thought save that of the cruel indignity with which she had been treated. No taunting voice would be raised. The rumour would have gone abroad that the young Prince Mamillius had been denied access to her, that the newly born babe, her one solace in her prison, had been taken from her and cast out to die a cruel death. The people would think, too, of the indecent haste which was now hurrying her to her trial before the Court of Justice, with no allowance for the time of rest, which, after the pains of maternity, "'longs to women of all fashion." Had she turned her head towards the crowd, she would have seen the men with bowed heads and looks of reverence and pity,—the women with streaming eyes bent tenderly and sympathisingly upon her. But, no! her thoughts were away upon the scene that awaited her. Would her strength avail for the strain which she knew was presently to be put upon it, when alone, unaided, she must plead her cause, with more than her life—her honour—at stake, and with him for her accuser, who should best have known how her whole nature belied his accusation? Sorely, indeed, does she need that the heavens shall look "with an aspect more favourable" upon her.

In the Hall of Justice, Leontes, seated, surrounded by the lords of his Court, opens the proceedings by protestations—how insincere, we know—of his grief at being constrained to bring his queen to trial in person. In obedience to his command, Hermione is brought in guarded, attended by Paulina and her ladies. She bows respectfully to the king, and is conducted to a dais, on which a cushioned chair has been allotted to her opposite to the

king. What a contrast do the royal pair present? Leontes, restless, feverish, irritable, trying to mask his intention to hear nothing that runs counter to his foregone conclusion, under the transparently unreal semblance of a simple desire for justice; Hermione, self-controlled, queenly, calm with the quiet courage of the martyr, prepared to lose her life, but resolute to vindicate her honour. The indictment is read, charging her with adultery with Polixenes, and with conspiring with him and Camillo against her husband's life. Rising from her seat, and with a voice in which the effects of her recent sufferings may be heard, she begins by expressing how bootless it must be for her to plead "not guilty," since the denial must rest solely upon her own testimony. Then, her voice deepening in tone as she proceeds, she enters on her defence—

"But thus ; if powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience. You, my lord, best know,
Who least will seem to do so, my past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true,
As I am now unhappy ; which is more
Than history can pattern, though devis'd
And play'd to take spectators. For, behold me,—
A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
A moiety of the throne, a great king's daughter,
The mother to a hopeful prince,—here standing
To prate and talk for life and honour 'fore
Who please to come and hear. For life, I prize it
As I weigh grief, which I would spare : for honour,
'Tis a derivative from me to mine,
And only that I stand for. I appeal
To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes
Came to your court, how I was in your grace,
How merited to be so ; since he came,
With what encounter so uncurrent I
Have strain'd to appear thus : if one jot beyond
The bound of honour, or in act or will
That way inclining, harden'd be the hearts
Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin
Cry fie upon my grave !"

This noble pleading, however, brings from Leontes no response but this—

"I ne'er heard yet,
That any of these bolder vices wanted
Less impudence to gainsay what they did,
Than to perform it first."

How temperate, how forbearing is her reply!—

"That's true enough ;
Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me."

"You will not own it?" exclaims Leontes, in a transport of anger. More than may be laid to her charge in name of fault, Hermione replies, "she must not acknowledge. For Polixenes," she continues—

"With whom I am accus'd, I do confess,
I lov'd him, as in honour he required,
With such a kind of love as might become
A lady like me ; with a love, even such,
So, and no other, as yourself commanded ;
Which not to have done, I think, had been in me
Both disobedience and ingratitude
To you, and towards your friend, whose love had spoke
Even since it could speak, from an infant, freely,
That it was yours. Now, for conspiracy
I know not how it tastes ; . . .
. . . . All I know of it,
Is that Camillo was an honest man ;
And why he left your court the gods themselves,
Wotting no more than I, are ignorant.

Leon. You knew of his departure, as you know
What you have underta'en to do in's absence.

Her. Sir,
You speak a language that I understand not.
My life lies in the level of your dreams,
Which I'll lay down."

Upon this Leontes reiterates his charge against her honour in language outrageous in its coarseness and cruelty, telling her "she shall feel his justice,"

"In whose easiest passage
Look for no less than death."

To this, with a voice trembling with emotion, and in it also something of impatience, Hermione replies—

"Sir, spare your threats :
The bug which you would fright me with I seek.

To me life can be no commodity.
 The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
 I do give lost ; for I do feel it gone,
 But know not how it went."

Hitherto she has borne with submission the insults and outrages heaped upon her,—forbearing directly to charge her wrongs upon Leontes. But now, as the thought of all she has been robbed of flashes upon her mind, her tones, laden with the anguish so long suppressed, vibrate with impassioned intensity.

" My second joy
 And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
 I am barr'd [*with a stifled sob in her voice*] like one infectious.

My third comfort,
 Starr'd most unluckily, is from my breast,
 The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,
 Haled out to murder ; myself on every post
 Proclaim'd a strumpet ; with immodest hatred
 The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs
 To women of all fashion ; lastly, hurried
 Here to this place, i' the open air, before
 I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
 Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
 That I should fear to die ? Therefore proceed."

Then summoning all her remaining strength, which is slowly ebbing, and with more vehemence than she has yet shown, and some indignation, she adds—

" But yet hear this ! Mistake me not : no life,
 I prize it not a straw, but for mine honour,
 Which I would free, if I shall be condemn'd
 Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else
 But what your jealousies awake, I tell you
 'Tis rigour and not law !"

These are the last words spoken by her to Leontes in the play. Turning from him,—unjust judge as he has throughout shown himself,—she addresses herself directly to the members of the court.

" Your honours all,
 I do refer me to the oracle :
 Apollo be my judge !"

Leontes is awed into silence. The hush is broken by the first

The prince, your son, with mere conceit and fear,
Of the queen's speed, is gone.

Leon.

How ! gone !

Serv.

Is dead."

Upon this a cry echoes through the hall like a death-knell ; the cry of a soul from which all happiness, all hope, are gone ; the cry of a broken heart, which shakes every other in the assembled crowd ; a cry that will ring in the ears of Leontes ever after, and that even now chases from his brain every mad delusion. Upon the instant his senses return to him, and all his monstrous distrust and cruelty and their consequences are seen by him in their true light :—

"Apollo's angry ; and the heavens themselves
Do strike at my injustice."

Then, as he sees a commotion around Hermione,—she has fallen back in a swoon into the arms of her women, who are crowding around her,—he cries, "How now there ?" The answer comes from Paulina, the lady whose warnings he had repelled with contumely :—

"This news is mortal to the queen : look down,
And see what death is doing."

Death ! He will not believe it. "Her heart is but o'ercharged ; she will recover." Fly to her side he dare not—he, unworthy to touch her whom he had so foully slandered. But as she is carried from the hall in the arms of her ladies, he says to them—

"Beseech you, tenderly apply to her
Some remedies for life."

Then follows a burst of contrition, in which those better qualities are seen, which had won and kept for him until now the love of his pure, high-hearted queen. They come back as suddenly as they had left him. He beseeches Apollo to forgive his great profaneness "'gainst his oracle" ; he will "new woo his queen," be reconciled to Polixenes, recall the good Camillo ; avowing at the same time his own guilty attempt to make him poison Polixenes. In the midst of these confessions he is interrupted by the return of Paulina with tidings of the yet heavier punishment which has overtaken him. She will not spare him.

Into her lips Shakespeare seems as if he wished to put, as the Greek tragedians put into those of the Chorus, the concentrated judgment of every man and woman in his kingdom :

"Thy tyranny,
Together working with thy jealousies,
Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle
For girls of nine,—oh, think what they have done,
And then run mad indeed, stark mad !"

She reminds him of his inconstancy and ingratitude to Polixenes, of his baseness in trying to poison good Camillo's honour. But these are only "poor trespasses, more monstrous standing by"—the casting forth to crows his baby-daughter, the death of the young prince—

"Whose honourable thoughts,
Thoughts high for one so tender, cleft the heart
That could conceive a gross and foolish sire
Blemish'd his gracious dam. . . .
. . . . But the last—oh lords !
When I have said, cry 'Woe !'—the queen, the queen,
The sweetest, dearest creature's *dead* ; and vengeance for't
Not dropp'd down yet.

First Lord. The higher powers forbid !

Paul. I say she's dead. I'll swear't. If word nor oath
Prevail not, go and see. If you can bring
Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,
Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you
As I would do the gods. But oh, thou tyrant !
Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
Than all thy woes can stir ; therefore, betake thee
To nothing but despair. A thousand knees,
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter,
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert."

Leontes accepts his chastisement ! Again he hears the piteous cry of his queen's broken heart, that cry which sleeping or waking will haunt him all his days. "Go on, go on !" he says,

"Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserv'd
All tongues to talk their bitterest."

Paulina sees the anguish of the bowed and hopelessly bereaved man. "He is touched," she says, "to the noble heart," and, the

passion of her grief having found vent, there is now room for her womanly compassion to reassert itself.

"Sir, royal sir, forgive a foolish woman !

The love I bore your queen—[*here her tears choke her*] lo, fool again !—

I'll speak of her no more, nor of your children.

I'll not remember you of my own lord,

Who is lost too. Take your patience to you,

And I'll say nothing.

Leon.

Thou didst speak but well,

When most the truth ; which I receive much better,

Than to be pitied of thee."

Surest sign of a sincere remorse. Neither reproof nor sympathy can meet a case like his. Only when alone with his dead can his penitence and grief find full vent—

"Prithee, bring me

To the dead bodies of my queen, and son :

One grave shall be for both. Upon them shall

The causes of their death appear, unto

Our shame perpetual. Once a-day I'll visit

The chapel where they lie : and tears, shed there,

Shall be my recreation. So long as nature

Will bear up with this exercise, so long

I daily vow to use it. Come, and lead me

To these sorrows."

And so we leave him with the woman whom but lately he had feared and spurned, but who, through the long years that were to pass before we meet them again, is to be the stay and comfort of his sorrow-stricken life.

The scene now changes to "a desert country near the sea in Bohemia." Shakespeare has been much blamed for giving to Bohemia a sea-coast. But it was not he who first did this. He simply followed Greene, apparently not thinking it worth while to deviate in this matter from the old tale, with which many of his audience must have been familiar. And, indeed, what necessity was there for minute geographical accuracy? The poet's business is to present human beings under conditions which give scope for the play of character and passion. If he so draws them that his audience becomes absorbed in the interest of the action, if he makes them feel that what his characters say and do is true

to nature, under the circumstances in which he has placed them, of what moment is it whether Bohemia has a sea-coast or not?

To this lonely spot Antigonus has come with his baby charge, accompanied by one of the sailors of the ship that has brought him from Sicily. A storm is rolling up. "In my conscience," says the seaman,

"The heavens with what we have in hand are angry,
And frown upon us."

He leaves Antigonus, urging him to make his best haste, and not to venture inland, for the place is haunted by beasts of prey. Left to himself, Antigonus gives the description of a dream,—a passage which Milton must, I think, have had in his mind when writing his sonnet "On his Deceased Wife." "Come, poor babe!" he says:

"I have heard, but not believ'd, the spirits of the dead
May walk again. If such thing be, thy mother
Appear'd to me last night; for ne'er was dream
So like a waking. *To me comes a creature,
Sometimes her head on one side, some another;
I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
So fill'd, and so becoming: in pure white robes
Like very sanctity she did approach
My cabin where I lay;*¹ thrice bowed before me,
And, gasping to begin some speech, her eyes
Became two spouts. The fury spent, anon
Did this break from her: 'Good Antigonus,
Since fate, against thy better disposition,
Hath made thy person for the thrower-out
Of my poor babe, according to thine oath,—
Places remote enough are in Bohemia,
There weep, and leave it crying; and, for the babe
Is counted lost for ever, Perdita,
I prithee, call it. For this ungentle business,
Put on thee by my lord, thou ne'er shalt see
Thy wife Paulina more!' And so, with shrieks
She melted into air."

A dream so vivid naturally makes Antigonus believe that Her-

¹ "Methought I saw my late espoused Saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave, . . .
And vested all in white, pure as her mind."—MILTON.

mione is dead, and that he has been visited by her spirit. He will follow her behest to leave the child in Bohemia, all the more because he thinks now, contrary to all his previous convictions, that it "being indeed the issue of Polixenes," Apollo wills that it should be left "either for life or death, upon the earth of its right father." For this conclusion he is scarcely to be forgiven. But his tenderness for the child is very sweet and touching. His words, "Blossom, speed thee well!" show how the babe has wound itself about his heart. It is wrapped in a warm rich mantle, and he places in a bundle a paper with its name, Perdita, upon it, and a large sum in gold with some costly baby dresses,

"Which may, if fortune please, both breed thee pretty,
And still rest thine."

Scarcely has he laid down his charge when he has to fly, pursued by a bear, into whose deadly clutches he presently falls, while the ship that brought him to Bohemia founders in the storm.

This we learn from an old shepherd and his son, in a scene where Shakespeare exhibits delightfully his familiarity with the talk and ways of country folks of that class. The shepherd exclaims on finding the babe: "Mercy on's! a barne, a very pretty barne! A boy or a child, I wonder? A pretty one, av ery pretty one!" Clearly, he thinks it is of gentle birth, though he suspects not honestly come by. He is a kindly man. "I'll take it up for pity!" he says, and waits to open the bundle until his son joins him, bringing news of the death of Antigonus and the shipwreck of his companions. "Heavy matters!" he says, "heavy matters! But look thee here, boy—here's a sight for thee! Look thee, a bearing-cloth [a christening mantle] for a squire's child!" He tells his son to open the bundle—

"So, let's see. It was told me I should be rich by the fairies. This is some changeling. What's within, boy?"

Clown. You're a made old man. . . . Gold, all gold!

Shep. This is fairy gold, boy, and 'twill prove so. Up with it, keep it close; home, home, the next way. We are lucky, boy, and to be so still requires nothing but secrecy."

And home he goes with the precious charge and the rich belong-

ings, which are years after to be the means of proving Perdita's parentage, while his clownish, good-natured son stays behind to bury so much of Antigonus as the bear has left. "That's a good deed," says his father; "'Tis a lucky day, and we'll do good deeds on't."

The poet had now to leap over an interval of sixteen years, a novelty in drama so daring, that he prepared his audience for it by a Soliloquy of Time as Chorus, in which he asks them to transport themselves to Bohemia and to remember well,

"I mention'd a son of the king's, which Florizel
I now name to you. And with speed so pace
To speak of Perdita, now grown in grace
Equal with wondering. . . . A shepherd's daughter."

More than this he will not tell them. They are to "let Time's news be known when 'tis brought forth," and, having thus kindled the curiosity of the audience as to how Florizel and Perdita are to work out the conclusion of the sad events which have gone before, the Chorus retires.

By the conversation of Polixenes and Camillo in the next scene, they are early put in the way to hope that it will work out happily, through the loves of Florizel and Perdita. Camillo, full of home-sickness, longs to go back to Sicily. "Besides," he says, "the king, my master, has sent for me; to whose feeling sorrows I may be some allay, or I o'erween to think so, which is another spur to my departure." Camillo has proved himself so valuable, however, as councillor and statesman, that Polixenes cannot agree to part with him, and begs him to speak no more of "that fatal Sicilia, whose very naming punishes me with the remembrance of that penitent and reconciled king, my brother, whose loss of his most precious queen and children are even now to be afresh lamented." The conversation then turns to the subject of the king's son Florizel, who has of late been in the habit of absenting himself from Court. His movements have been watched, and a report brought to Polixenes, "that he is seldom from the house of a most homely shepherd; a man, they say, that from very nothing, and beyond the imagination of his neighbours, is grown into an unspeakable estate." Camillo, too, has heard "of such a man, who hath a daughter of most rare note. The report of her

is extended more than can be thought to begin from such a cottage." The matter is one which must be seen to, and Camillo agrees to go with Polixenes in disguise to the shepherd, from whom it is thought it will be easy to learn the reason of Florizel's frequent visits to his farm.

We now see that the shepherd has acted in accordance with what he said of his good luck, that it "wanted nothing but secrecy." He has kept his secret well, and so, too, have his wife, now dead, and his clownish son. Little by little he has made use of some of the gold he found with Perdita, managing it so as not to raise surmises among his neighbours, while growing by slow degrees into a well-to-do sheep-farmer. When we next see him, he is keeping the festival of the sheep-shearing, which, it appears, he has celebrated handsomely for many years. He speaks of his wife's active part in these festivals in days gone by, and how pleasant is the picture! She is no Bohemian housewife, but a true English dame, such as Shakespeare had no doubt seen in many a country homestead—

"When my old wife liv'd, upon
This day she was both pantler, butler, cook,
Both dame and servant ; welcom'd all, serv'd all ;
Would sing her song, and dance her turn ; now here,
At upper end of the table, now in the middle ;
On his shoulder, and his ; her face o' fire
With labour ; and the thing she took to quench it,
She would to each one sip."

Such a woman, we may be sure, would be a good mother to the poor foundling so strangely cast upon her care. As the child grew older, these kindly folks would use the means which came with her to give her the best education that was to be had. By-and-by they would see something about her superior to the other country lasses—something that so commanded their respect and admiration, that she would be spared the rough work of their household and farm. She took, we see, her share of herding the sheep, and the lighter work of their simple home. But she would live the while in a world of observation, thought, and fancy, in which they had no share, and so she became in person and mind and manner such as we imagine Hermione to have been

in her happy days of girlhood. Especial pains indeed seem to have been taken to make us see the mother in the child. Although placed amid surroundings so widely different, we can trace in her the same nature, the same gentle dignity of manner, the same thoughtful spirit, the same unstudied grace of movement, the same refined beauty of both face and form.

Well may Florizel "bless the time, when his good falcon made his flight across" the ground of the old shepherd's farm. The moment his eye rests upon Perdita, he is drawn by an irresistible instinct towards her. She is thenceforth the ruler of his life. He cannot be, to use his own words, "his own, nor anything to any, if he be not hers." Their story in this respect is like that of Ferdinand and Miranda in *The Tempest*, and it is hard to say which of these tales of love at first sight Shakespeare has invested with the greater charm. From the first moment, we learn from Prospero, Ferdinand and Miranda "are both in either's power." It is not so said expressly of Perdita, yet it was probably no less true of her than of her princely lover. Unlike Miranda, she had seen many men; but what a vision of noble manly beauty must Florizel have presented to her eyes! Being what he was in person and in mind, he must, in contrast with the rustics around her, have been as much a delightful revelation as Ferdinand was to Miranda, when, thinking him a being of another world, she calls him "a thing divine, for nothing natural I ever saw so noble." Such natures must have been quickly drawn together. It was impossible for Perdita, with her inborn sympathies with all that was refined and noble, to withhold her heart from one in every way fitted to awake the slumbering soul within her, touched, as she must have been, to find herself approached with reverential homage by one so different from all her eyes had ever seen. From the first he has made no secret of his royal blood; but, come what may, she is to be his queen. Perdita, who believes the shepherd to be her father, though dwelling more than her lover upon their difference in rank, and apprehensive that this must disunite them, yet cannot in her frank simplicity hide from him that their love is mutual.

At every successive meeting he finds fresh graces in her. He sees that in spite of her superior beauty her companions are not

envious. Their submission to her sway—the influence of native dignity—is involuntary. She is as unconscious of it as they are. She is chosen by them as their queen in all their sports, and with most queenly graciousness she distributes her flowers and other simple favours among them, Florizel watching her every movement. He is as much amazed as attracted by the poetic turn of her thoughts, by the way she gives expression to them, by the wisdom, the winning humility of a creature who, in all she does and says, fascinates him with sweet surprises. In her soft voice, her words, her mien, there is something that speaks unmistakably of the royal blood within her. This it is left to the impersonator of Perdita to suggest. The audience should be made to feel as well as to see the princess. Florizel does so; and hence it is that not his heart only is enthralled, but his judgment also—nay, his whole being. He is her subject, and she is his queen-elect, worthy, most worthy, to share his present state and future royalty, and to do grace and honour to them both.

He has won her consent to be his bride, when the poet introduces them to us at the sheep-shearing festival. Florizel entreats her to cast aside all misgiving as to what his father may attempt, and to receive her guests with a light heart:—

“Lift up your countenance, as it were the day
Of celebration of that nuptial, which
We two have sworn shall come. . . .
. . . . Your guests approach,
Address yourself to entertain them sprightly,
And let's be red with mirth.”

Among the guests are Polixenes and Camillo in disguise. They are quickly attracted by the pre-eminence among the rustic revellers of one strikingly unlike them, both in look and in demeanour. Florizel has persuaded Perdita to wear a costly dress which he has provided for her, as more befitting the queen of the feast, and more worthily setting off her most rare beauty. She has yielded reluctantly, as we infer from what she says:—

“Your high self,
The gracious mark o' the land, you have obscur'd
With a swain's wearing; and me, poor lowly maid,
Most goddess-like pranked up.”

No more than, were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say, 'twere well."

Camillo, like Polixenes, has come under her "strong toil of grace"—a grace that wakens a haunting memory of the much-wronged queen. She offers flowers to him also, with words so winning that he says—

"I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,
And only live by gazing."

How pretty is her answer!—

"Out, alas!
You'd be so lean that blasts of January
Would blow you through and through."

She has now to think of her friends the shepherdesses, and of Florizel, who are waiting for smiles and posies from their queen. She longs for spring flowers, as more suited to their youth, and bursts into that exquisite enumeration of the gems of an old English garden, which can never be too often read:—

"Oh, Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frightened, thou lett'st fall
From Dis's waggon! Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength; . . .
. bold oxlips, and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one! Oh, these I lack,
To make you garlands of!"

This is spoken to the young girls about her—then, turning to Florizel—

"And, my sweet friend,
To strew him o'er and o'er. . . ."

Surprised at her own vivacity, which she fears may perhaps have made her too liberal in her speech, she adds—

"Methinks I play as I have seen them do
In Whitsun' pastorals; sure this robe of mine
Does change my disposition."

Flor. That, were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,
 Thereof most worthy ; were I the fairest youth
 That ever made eye swerve,—had force, and knowledge,
 More than was ever man's, I would not prize them,
 Without her love,—for her employ them all,—
 Commend them, and command them, to her service,
 Or to their own perdition."

At this avowal Polixenes might have been expected to interfere, but he refrains. In answer to the old shepherd's question, "But, my daughter, say you the like to him?" Perdita replies—

"I cannot speak
 So well, nothing so well ; no, nor mean better :
 By the pattern of my own thoughts I cut out
 The purity of his.

Shep. Take hands, a bargain !
 And, friends unknown, you shall bear witness to't."

He is about to join the lovers' hands, when Polixenes interrupts him, and asks Florizel if his father is alive, and knows of this purposed marriage, urging, that in a matter of such grave importance, his counsel should be taken. Florizel admits the force of his reasons. There are others, however, why he cannot make a confidant of his father. In vain Polixenes and the shepherd entreat him to let his father know. "Come, come, he must not," Florizel impatiently rejoins ; "mark our contract." "Mark your divorce, young sir !" exclaims Polixenes, throwing off his disguise, and pouring out a vehement invective upon the lovers, and also upon the shepherd, who now learns to his dismay that the king's son is his daughter's lover. Of Perdita Polixenes is especially unsparing. "Thou piece of excellent witchcraft," as he calls her,

"I'll have thy beauty scratch'd with briars, and made
 More homely than thy state ! . . . If ever, henceforth, thou
 These rural latches to his entrance open,
 Or hoop his body more with thy embraces,
 I will devise a death as cruel for thee
 As thou art tender to't."

With these words he goes away, commanding Florizel to follow him to the Court. Meanwhile his son has maintained a dutiful silence. He does not interrupt his father, and indeed does not speak for some time after he has gone, fully recognising the

difficulty of his position, but resolved to remain true to his troth-plight. Perdita, however, resigns herself to lose him. His father's words have stung her, and her princely spirit has nearly made her meet his menaces with the rebuke they merited. She is the first to speak :

“I was not much afeard ; for once or twice,
I was about to speak, and tell him plainly,
The self-same sun that shines upon his court
Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
Looks on alike. (*To Florizel.*) Will't please you, sir, begone ?
I told you what would come of this. Beseech you,
Of your own state take care. This dream of mine,
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,
But milk my ewes, and weep.”

Florizel now shows what has occupied his thoughts—“Why look you so upon me ?” he says to Camillo, who has remained behind the king :

“I am but sorry, not afeard ; delay'd
But nothing alter'd. What I was, I am.”

Camillo, who has not thrown off his disguise, but whom Florizel now recognises, urges him not to come before his father until “the fury of his highness settle.” This Florizel has already resolved. The vow he has given to Perdita shall not be broken. Without her, life would not be life. He tells Camillo—

“Not for Bohemia, nor the pomp that may
Be thereat glean'd,—for all the sun sees, or
The close earth wombs, or the profound sea hides
In unknown fathoms, will I break my oath
To this my fair beloved. Therefore, I pray you,
As you have ever been my father's honour'd friend,
When he shall miss me,—as, in faith, I mean not
To see him any more,—cast your good counsels
Upon his passion. Let myself and fortune
Tug for the life to come.”

He has a vessel hard by, and he means to put to sea “with her, whom here he cannot hold on shore.” This design, it occurs to Camillo, may also serve his own turn, while saving the prince from danger, by enabling him to see his loved Sicilia again,

"And that unhappy king, my master, whom I so much thirst to see."

Let Florizel then make for Sicily, and present himself and his "fair princess, for so, I see, she must be," to Leontes, who will welcome them with open arms. He is to say, that he is sent by his father to greet Leontes, "and to give him comforts." Camillo will give him written instructions what he is to report as from his father, "things known betwixt us three," so

“He shall not perceive,
But that you have your father’s bosom there,
And speak his very heart.”

Other reasons personal to the lovers he urges, concluding with—

“ Besides, you know,
Prosperity's the very bond of love ;
Whose fresh complexion and whose heart together
Affliction alters.”

Perdita has hitherto been silent. Now she speaks in words that, in their grave sincerity, remind us of Hermione,

“One of these is true :
I think affliction may subdue the cheek,
But not take in the mind.”

How beautiful is what follows!—

"Cam. Yea, say you so?
There shall not, at your father's house, these seven years
Be born another such.

Flo. My good Camillo,
She is as forward of her breeding, as
She is 'i the rear of our birth.

Cam. I cannot say, 'tis pity
She lacks instructions, for she seems a mistress
To most that teach.

Per. Your pardon, sir ;
For this I'll blush you thanks."

There is still the difficulty as to the attire in which the fugitives are to appear at the Sicilian Court. But Camillo assures them that, as his fortunes all lie in Sicily, he will take care they are "royally appointed." His letters will be there, too, when

they arrive, and "shall clear all doubt," while his influence will also be used to procure letters from Leontes which shall secure their pardon from Polixenes. He aids them to get aboard so disguised as to escape observation. For this purpose he makes Florizel exchange garments with Autolycus, who has opportunely come that way. This quick-witted gentleman's first thought is, how he may turn to his own profit his suspicions of "the piece of iniquity" which his former young master Florizel "is about." But he argues himself into a resolution most appropriate to such an engrained rogue. "If I thought it were a piece of honesty to acquaint the king withal, I would not do't; I hold it the more knavery to conceal it; and therein am I constant to my profession." At this point the shepherd and his son are seen approaching. "Aside, aside; here is more matter for a hot brain. Every lane's end, every shop, church, session, hanging, yields a careful man work."

And work he quickly finds in the simplicity of the new-comers. They are talking of going to the king and turning aside his wrath against themselves by telling him that Perdita is none of their flesh and blood, and producing the things which were found with her. "There is that in this fardel will make him scratch his beard." Autolycus at this pricks up his ears. "I know not," he says, "what impediment this complaint may be to the flight of my master. Though I am not naturally honest, I am so sometimes by chance." And then in a scene of the rarest humour he frightens the rustics into placing themselves in his hands. He promises to take them to the king, but carries them instead to the prince's ship, where what they have to tell will, he hopes, "do the prince his master good," and at the same time minister to his own advancement.

The scene now returns to the palace of Leontes, where we find him with Cleomenes, Dion, Paulina, and others. Such expiation as sixteen years of suffering could make for wrong he has made. In vain his courtiers urge him to forget the evil he had wrought. His remembrance of his chief victim is too vivid for that—his loss too terrible in having

"Destroy'd the sweet'st companion that e'er man
Bred his hopes out of."

The thought of Mamillius, also, haunts him, and when Paulina makes an allusion to the boy, he implores her to spare him. "Thou know'st," he tells her, "he dies to me again when talked of," and warns her, that her words may "bring him to consider that, which may unfurnish him of reason." Paulina, his sharpest monitress in his hours of frenzy, has stood loyally by him in his affliction. "Oh grave and good Paulina, the comfort I have had of thee!" he exclaims in the fulness of his heart, at a time when, unknown to him, she is preparing for him a solace beyond all he could have dreamed of; and we can see that, while she has sustained him by her sympathy, she has strengthened him by her vigorous judgment, on which he has wisely been fain to lean.

When he is importuned by his courtiers to make a second marriage and give an heir to the throne, Paulina stands alone in maintaining that this must not be, reminding them that the oracle had declared that he should have no heir till his lost child was found. Her argument prevails. "Oh," says Leontes,

"that ever I
Had squar'd me to thy counsel! Then, even now
I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes,
Have taken treasure from her lips—
Paul. And left them
More rich for what they yielded.
Leon. Thou speak'st truth.
No more such wives; therefore no wife.
. My true Paulina.
We shall not marry till thou bidd'st us.
Paul. That
Shall be when your first queen's again in breath;
Never till then."

It is here the first hint is given that Hermione is still alive. How this could be, and how the secret could have been so well kept, Shakespeare gives no hint. One is thus driven to work out the problem for one's self. My view has been always this. The death-like trance into which Hermione fell on hearing of her son's death lasted so long, and had so completely the semblance of death, that it was so regarded by her husband, her attendants, and even by Paulina. The suspicion that animation was only suspended may have dawned upon Paulina, when, after the boy

Mamillius had been laid by his mother's side, the inevitable change began to appear in him and not in Hermione. She would not give voice to her suspicion for fear of creating a false hope, but had the queen conveyed secretly to her own home, making arrangements, which her high position and then paramount power would enable her to make, that only the boy, and his mother's empty coffin, should be carried to the tomb. When after many days the trance gave way, Paulina would be near to perceive the first flickering of the eyelids, the first faint flush of blood returning to the cheek. Who can say how long the fearful shock to nerves and brain may have left Hermione in a state of torpor, hardly half alive, unconscious of everything that was passing around her, with a piteous look in those full eyes, so dear to Paulina, of a wounded, stricken, voiceless animal? And so the uneventful years would pass away, as such years do somehow pass with those whose lives are blanks. Gradually, as time wore on, Hermione would recognise her faithful Paulina, and such of her other ladies as were in the secret. Their tender care would move her in time to wish to live, because they wished it, and because Paulina could comfort her with the hope the oracle had given, that her lost daughter might one day be found. Upon this slender hope—the words are her own—she “preserved herself to see the issue.” The name of Leontes is not mentioned. For a while he appears to be mercifully swept from her remembrance. She is not unforgiving, but her heart is dead towards him. Paulina feels that she dares not speak his name. It might awake too terribly the recollection of the misery he had brought upon her mistress, and in her enfeebled state prove fatal. The secret that their queen was still alive had been marvellously kept; although it had not escaped notice that Paulina had “privately, twice or thrice a-day, ever since the death of Hermione, visited the removed house,” to which she had been secretly conveyed. Seeing the genuine contrition of Leontes, Paulina would not abandon the hope that Hermione might in time be reconciled to him. She had therefore the strongest reason to protest against the projects of marriage which were pressed upon him by his ministers.

And an event was now at hand, which could not fail to bring

about this reconciliation,—the arrival at the palace of the fugitive lovers. The impression produced by Perdita upon the gentlemen of the Court makes him who speaks for them too eloquent in her praise to please Paulina. Loyal to her love for Hermione, she rebukes him by reminding him, when he calls this new beauty “the most peerless piece of earth that e’er the sun shone bright on,” that he had said and written more than this of his lost queen. Manfully he adheres to what he has said, in words that show how well Shakespeare knew the feeling of all true women towards those of their own sex who do honour to it.

“Women will love her, that she is a woman,
More worth than any man; men, that she is
The rarest of all women.”

The arrival of Florizel with Perdita is quickly followed by that of his father in pursuit, and Leontes learns from one of his lords that there is no truth in the tale Florizel had told of bearing messages to him from Polixenes, and of Perdita’s royal birth,—the tale which Camillo had directed him to tell. But the fugitives have so won upon his heart,—Perdita especially, who by her looks has reminded him of his lost queen,—that he determines to plead their cause with Polixenes.

This is soon after made an easy task by the confession of the shepherd and his son as to the finding of Perdita, and by the production of the mantle of Hermione, the letter of Antigonus, and the gold and other things which were found with her. These proofs, as we are told by one of the lords who was present, together with “the majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother;—the affection of nobleness which nature shows above her breeding,—and many other evidences, proclaimed her with all certainty to be the king’s daughter.” The whole of this scene, which is of necessity omitted in the acted play, is of rare beauty. The meeting of the two kings is depicted with remarkable power. How exquisite is the stroke of pathos when, speaking of Leontes, “ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter,” he is described as crying out, as if that joy were now become a loss, “Oh, thy mother! thy mother!” Not less graphic is the picture of Paulina.

"But oh, the noble combat that, 'twixt joy and sorrow, was fought in Paulina! She had one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled; she lifted the princess from the earth, and so locks her in embracing as if she would pin her to her heart, that she might no more be in danger of losing."

Paulina now has no longer any reason for withholding from Leontes the secret of his wife's existence. She ingeniously prepares a mode of revealing it by presenting Hermione to him in the semblance of a statue, on which she tells him a rare artist has been for years at work, and which he has slightly coloured to give it a more lifelike look. It was necessary to lay emphasis on this colouring, as the living Hermione, however skilfully arranged, must of necessity be very different from an ordinary statue. My dress in acting this scene was arranged to carry out this effect. It was composed of soft white cashmere, the draperies and edges bordered with the royal purple enriched with a tracery in gold, and thus harmonising with the colouring of the lips, eyes, hair, &c., of the statue.

To see this peerless work of art Leontes comes to what Shakespeare describes as "a chapel in Paulina's house," accompanied by Polixenes, their children, Camillo, and other members of the Court. They have passed through a gallery of works of art, but, says Leontes—

"We saw not
That which my daughter came to look upon,
The statue of her mother.
Paul. As she liv'd peerless,
So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
Excels whatever yet you look'd upon,
Or hand of man hath done. Therefore, I keep it
Lonely, apart. But here it is. Prepare to see
The life as lively mock'd as ever
Still sleep mock'd death. Behold, and say, 'tis well."

At the back of the stage, when I acted in this play, was a dais which was led up to by a flight of six or eight steps, covered with rich cloth of the same material and crimson colour as the closed curtains. The curtains when gradually opened by Paulina disclosed, at a little distance behind them, the statue of Hermione, with a pedestal of marble by her side.

Here let me say, that I never approached this scene without much inward trepidation. You may imagine how difficult it must be to stand in one position, with a full light thrown upon you, without moving an eyelid for so long a time. I never thought to have the time measured, but I should say that it must be more than ten minutes—it seemed like *ten* times ten. I prepared myself by picturing what Hermione's feelings would be when she heard Leontes' voice, silent to her for so many years, and listened to the remorseful tender words addressed to what he believed to be her sculptured semblance. Her heart hitherto has been full only of her lost children. She has thought every other feeling dead, but she finds herself forgetting all but the tones of the voice, once so loved, now broken with the accents of repentance and woe-stricken desolation. To her own surprise her heart, so long empty, loveless, and cold, begins to throb again, as she listens to the outpourings of a devotion she had believed to be extinct. She would remember her own words to him, when the familiar loving tones were turned to anger and almost imprecation, "I never wished to see you sorry ; now I trust I shall."

Of the sorrow she had thus wished for him she is now a witness, and it all but unnerves her. Paulina had, it seemed to me, besought Hermione to play the part of her own statue, in order that she might hear herself apostrophised, and be a silent witness of the remorse and unabated love of Leontes before her existence became known to him, and so be moved to that forgiveness which, without such proof, she might possibly be slow to yield. She is so moved ; but for the sake of the loving friend to whom she has owed so much she must restrain herself, and carry through her appointed task.

But, even although I had fully thought out all this, it was impossible for me ever to hear unmoved what passes in this wonderful scene. My first Leontes was Mr Macready, and, as the scene was played by him, the difficulty of wearing an air of statuesque calm became almost insuperable. As I think over the scene now, his appearance, his action, the tones of his voice, the emotions of that time, come back. There was a dead awe-struck silence, when the curtains were gradually drawn aside by Paulina. She has to encourage Leontes to speak.

"I like your silence, it the more shows off
Your wonder. But yet speak—first you, my liege,
Comes it not something near?"

Then with what wonderful tenderness of tone Mr Macready answered—

“ Her natural posture !
Chide me, dear stone ; that I may say, indeed,
Thou art Hermione ; *or, rather, thou art she*
In thy not chiding ; for she was as tender
As infancy and grace.”

His eyes seemed to devour the figure before him, as the scene proceeded, and he said—

“ Oh, thus she stood,
Even with such life of majesty,—warm life,
As now it coldly stands, when first I woo’d her !
I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me,
For being more stone than it ? Oh, royal piece,
There’s magic in thy majesty, which has
My evils conjured to remembrance, and
From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
Standing like stone with thee.

Per. And give me leave
And do not say, 'tis superstition, that
I kneel, and then implore her blessing. Lady
Dear queen, that ended when I but began,
Give me that hand of yours to kiss."

But the time for this has not arrived, and Paulina prevents her, saying, the colour on the statue is not yet dry. Leontes stands so broken down with the bitter remembrances the statue calls up, that he is urged by Polixenes and Camillo to subdue his grief. Paulina, also deeply moved, exclaims—

“Indeed, my lord,
If I had thought the sight of my poor image
Would thus have wrought you,—for the stone is mine,—
I’d not have show’d it ;”—

and is about to close the curtain. Never can I forget the manner in which Mr Macready here cried out, "Do not draw the curtain!" and, afterwards, when Paulina says—

"No longer shall you gaze on't, lest your fancy
May think anon it moves"—

"*Let be, let be !*" in tones irritable, commanding, and impossible to resist. "Would I were dead," he continues, "but that, methinks already——" Has he seen something that makes him think the statue lives? Mr Macready indicated this, and hurriedly went on—

"What was he that did make it? See, my lord,
Would you not deem it breathed? And that those veins
Did verily bear blood. . . .
The fixture of her eye has motion in't,
As we are mocked with art.

Paul. I'll draw the curtain.
My lord's almost so far transported, that
He'll think anon it lives.

Leon. Oh sweet Paulina,
Make me to think so twenty years together;
No settled senses of the world can match
The pleasure of that madness. *Let it alone !*

Paul. I am sorry, sir, I have thus far stirr'd you : but
I could afflict you further.

Leon. Do, Paulina,
For this affliction has a taste as sweet
As any cordial comfort."

His eyes have been so riveted upon the figure, that he sees, what the others have not seen, that there is something about it beyond the reach of art. He continues—

"Still, methinks,
There is an air comes from her : What fine chisel
Could ever yet cut breath? Let no man mock me,
For I will kiss her."

Paulina again interposes with the same suggestion as before, that "the ruddiness on the lip being wet," "he would mar the work," adding, "Shall I draw the curtain?"

"*Leon.* No, not these twenty years.

Per. So long could I
Stand by a looker on."

Paulina sees that the strain upon Hermione and all present must not be prolonged ; and she tells them—

"If you can behold it,
I'll make the statue move indeed. . . .

. It is required
 You do awake your faith. Then, all stand still.
 . . . Music awake her, strike! (*Music.*)
 'Tis time, descend, be stone no more: approach!
 Strike all that look upon with marvel; come."

You may conceive the relief I felt, when the first strain of solemn music set me free to breathe! There was a pedestal by my side on which I leant. It was a slight help during the long strain upon the nerves and muscles, besides allowing me to stand in that "natural posture" which first strikes Leontes, and which therefore could not have been rigidly statuesque. By imperceptibly altering the poise of the body, the weight of it being on the forward foot, I could drop into the easiest position from which to move. The hand and arm still resting quietly on the pedestal materially helped me. Towards the close of the strain the head slowly turned, the "full eyes" moved, and at the last note rested on Leontes.

This movement, together with the expression of the face, transfigured as we may imagine it to have been by years of sorrow and devout meditation,—speechless, yet saying things unutterable,—always produced a startling, magnetic effect upon all—the audience upon the stage as well as in front of it. After the burst of amazement had hushed down, at a sign from Paulina the solemn sweet strain recommenced. The arm and hand were gently lifted from the pedestal; then, rhythmically following the music, the figure descended the steps that led up to the dais, and advancing slowly, paused at a short distance from Leontes. Oh, can I ever forget Mr Macready at this point! At first he stood speechless, as if turned to stone; his face with an awe-struck look upon it. Could this, the very counterpart of his queen, be a wondrous piece of mechanism? Could art so mock the life? He had seen her laid out as dead, the funeral obsequies performed over her, with her dear son beside her. Thus absorbed in wonder, he remained until Paulina said, "Nay, present your hand." Tremblingly he advanced, and touched gently the hand held out to him. Then, what a cry came with, "O, she's warm!" It is impossible to describe Mr Macready here. He was Leontes' very self!

His passionate joy at finding Hermione really alive seemed beyond control. Now he was prostrate at her feet, then enfolding her in his arms. I had a slight veil or covering over my head and neck, supposed to make the statue look older. This fell off in an instant. The hair, which came unbound, and fell on my shoulders, was reverently kissed and caressed. The whole change was so sudden, so overwhelming, that I suppose I cried out hysterically, for he whispered to me, "Don't be frightened, my child! don't be frightened! Control yourself!" All this went on during a tumult of applause that sounded like a storm of hail. Oh, how glad I was to be released, when, as soon as a lull came, Paulina, advancing with Perdita, said, "Turn, good lady, our Perdita is found." A broken trembling voice, I am very sure, was mine, as I said—

"You gods, look down,
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own,
Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found
Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear, that I,—
Knowing by Paulina, that the oracle
Gave hope thou wast in being,—have preserved
Myself to see the issue."

It was such a comfort to me, as well as true to natural feeling, that Shakespeare gives Hermione no words to say to Leontes, but leaves her to assure him of her joy and forgiveness by look and manner only, as in his arms she feels the old life, so long suspended, come back to her again.

I was called upon to play Hermione very soon after my *début*. I was still very young, and by my years and looks most unfit even to appear as the mother of the young Mamillius. Why Mr Macready selected me for the task I could not imagine, and most gladly would I have declined it. But his will was law. Any remonstrance or objection was met by reasons and arguments so broad and strong,—you were so earnestly reminded of your duty to sacrifice yourself to the general good, and the furtherance of the effort he was making to regenerate the drama,—that there was nothing left but to give way. All you could urge seemed so small, so merely personal. Therefore play Hermione I must, even as I had not long after to play Constance of Bretagne, a still

severer trial and much greater strain upon my young shoulders. Hermione was a character that had not then come within the circle of my favourite Shakespearian heroines. It was, therefore, quite new to me. Mrs Warner had been for years the recognised Hermione of the London stage. On this occasion she was cast for Paulina, a character for which nature had eminently fitted her by a stately figure, fine voice, and firm, earnest manner. How admirably she acted Emilia in *Othello* I must ever remember, especially the way she turned on Othello in the last scene, in which Mr Macready was also very grand. On the audience, who could see their looks and gestures, the impression they made must have been very great indeed. I, as the smothered Desdemona, could hear only.

My first appearance as Hermione is indelibly imprinted on my memory by the acting of Mr Macready as I have described it in the statue scene. Mrs Warner had rather jokingly told me, at one of the rehearsals, to be *prepared* for something extraordinary in his manner, when Hermione returned to life. But prepared I was not, and could not be, for such a display of uncontrollable rapture. I have tried to give some idea of it; but no words of mine could do it justice. It was the finest burst of passionate speechless emotion I ever saw, or could have conceived. My feelings being already severely strained, I naturally lost something of my self-command, and as Perdita and Florizel knelt at my feet I looked, as the gifted Sarah Adams¹ afterwards told me, "like Niobe, all tears." Of course, I behaved better on the repetition of the play, as I knew what I had to expect and was somewhat prepared for it; but the intensity of Mr Macready's passion was so real, that I never could help being moved by it, and feeling much exhausted afterwards.

The Winter's Tale makes heavy demands upon the resources of a theatre both in actors and *mise en scène*. It was therefore only in such cities as Dublin, Glasgow, and Edinburgh that I was

¹ This sweet accomplished lady wrote many poems and hymns. Her drama in blank verse, founded on the story of "Vivia Perpetua," one of the first Christian martyrs, was greatly admired in a wide literary circle. Her beautiful hymn "Nearer, my God, to Thee," we all know, and are moved by, when sung in our churches as it often is.

able to have it acted. But in all these cities, even with such inadequate resources as they supplied, the play used to produce a profound impression. The sympathies of my audience for the suffering Hermione were reflected back upon me so warmly as to make me feel that they entered into my conception of her beautiful nature, such as I have here endeavoured to present it. There, as in London, the statue scene always produced a remarkable effect. This I could feel in the intense hush, as though every one present "held his breath for the time." In Edinburgh, upon one occasion, I have been told by a friend who was present that, as I descended from the pedestal and advanced towards Leontes, the audience simultaneously rose from their seats, as if drawn out of them by surprise and reverential awe at the presence of one who bore more of heaven than of earth about her. I can only account for this by supposing that the soul of Hermione had for the time entered into mine, and "so divinely wrought, that one might almost say," with the old poet, my "body thought." Of course I did not observe this movement of the audience, for my imagination was too full of what I felt was then in Hermione's heart, to leave me eyes for any but Leontes. You may judge of the pleasure it was to play to audiences of this kind. As "there is a pleasure in poetic pains, which only poets know," so there is a pleasure in the actor's pains, which only actors know, who have to deal with the "high actions and high passions" of which Milton speaks. Unless they know these pains, and feel a joy in knowing them, their vocation can never rise to the level of an art.

I fear, my dear Lord Tennyson, I have tried your patience with this long letter. But in this fine play I have had to write of three exquisite types of womanhood—the mother, the maiden, and the friend. In what other play or story do we find three such women? In lingering over their excellences I may have lost account of time and thus wearied you. If I have, pray forgive me this once, and believe me to be ever, with deep admiration and gratitude, very sincerely yours,

HELENA FAUCIT MARTIN.

1st November 1890,
BRYNTYSILIO, LLANGOLLEN.

A P P E N D I X

This image shows a document page where nearly all content has been obscured by heavy black redaction marks. Only a few fragments of text are visible at the top and bottom edges of the page. The redactions consist of several thick, horizontal black bars of varying lengths covering the majority of the page area.

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APPENDIX.

MR BROWNING'S "BLOT ON THE SCUTCHEON," p. 51.

THE comparative non-success of this fine play was probably quite as much due to Mr Macready not playing the part of Lord Tresham as to the circumstances mentioned in the text. He had promised Mr Browning conditionally that he would undertake it, but in the meanwhile had given the part to Mr Phelps to study and rehearse. The drama was brought out in a great hurry, and after insufficient rehearsals. At nearly the eleventh hour Mr Macready proposed to assume the part of Tresham; but to this change Mr Browning demurred, as not being fair to Mr Phelps. Accordingly Mr Phelps was left to play it,—a serious misfortune, for he was not fitted for such a character, whereas it was one in which Mr Macready must have excelled. As it was, the play, though well received, was only performed a few times. Had it been strengthened by Mr Macready's personal aid, the result would most probably have been different. The incident caused, I believe, a serious estrangement for the time, as Mr Browning considered he had not been frankly dealt with by Mr Macready. I played Mildred Tresham, as I had formerly played Lucy Percy, Countess of Carlisle, in Mr Browning's *Strafford*. With his wonted generosity Mr Browning spoke of what I had done for his heroines in the following lines, written in my album soon after the production of *The Blot on the Scutcheon*. On the opposite page were some verses, in which flowers played a prominent part. This circumstance, and the particulars above given, will explain allusions in the lines, which might otherwise be obscure.

"There's a sisterhood in words—
 Still along with 'flowers' go 'birds.'
 Is it but three weeks to-day
 Since they played a luckless play,
 And 'the Treshams,' like a band
 Of full-fledged nestlings, left my hand
 To flutter forth, the wide world over?
 Just three weeks! yet see—each rover
 Here, with more or less unsteady
 Winglets, nearly reached already,
 In the Past, so dim, so dim,
 A place where Lucy, Strafford, Pym,
 My elder brood of early years,
 Wait peacefully their new compeers.
 Then, good voyage! shall it grieve me
 Vastly, that such ingrates leave me?
 Why, this March, this very morning
 Hatched my latest brood, take warning,
 Each one worth you put together!
 April sees them full in feather—
 And how we'll welcome May's glad weather!

Helen Faucit, you have twice
 Proved my Bird of Paradise!
 He, who would my wits inveigle
 Into boasting him my eagle,
 Turns out very like a Raven:
 Fly off, Blacky, to your haven!
 But *you*, softest dove, must never
 Leave me, as he does, for ever—
 I will strain my eyes to blindness,
 Ere lose sight of you and kindness.
 'Genius' is a common story!
 Few guess that the spirit's glory,
 They hail nightly, is the sweetest,
 Fairest, gentlest, and completest
 Shakespeare's-Lady's, ever poet
 Longed for! Few guess this: *I* know it."

"HATCHAM, SURREY, *March 4, '43.*"

These lines were accompanied by the following letter:—

"My DEAR MISS FAUCIT,—Here is your album, with my best thanks for the honour you have done me by asking some rhymes

for it: and here are the rhymes themselves—poor enough, most probably, but sincere, quite as certainly. I wish from my soul it were in my power to find some worthier way of proving the admiration and gratitude with which I remain, my dear Miss Faucit, yours ever faithfully,

“ROBERT BROWNING.”

ANECDOTE OF CHARLES DICKENS, p. 129.

THE words quoted in the text bring back to me an evening in Mr Macready's drawing-room. The party was a mixed one of grown-up people and children. We had gone through many games and dances, when some one suggested the game of “Proverbs.” “The devil is never so black as he is painted” was selected. The questioner, Mr Maclise, the painter, challenged me for the second word, and I had to get it into my answer. Imagine my confusion, which, alas! every one seemed to enjoy. I was on the point of giving up, as I could think of no suitable reply to bring in the word. But when the general merriment and my nervousness were at their height, some one behind my chair whispered, “What did you say to the nurse last night, when she was keeping you in that cruel suspense?” In an instant I sprang up and said, “What devil art thou, that dost torment me thus?” I suppose quotations were allowed, for I was applauded, and a great deal of merriment followed. I looked round for my friendly helper, and saw Mr Charles Dickens stealing away unsuspected by any one, and looking as though he had casually left his seat for no especial purpose. When I thanked him afterwards for his help, he turned it off, saying, “Oh, the words must have come into your own head,—how should I have thought of them?” This was the way he did his kindnesses—never so happy as when doing them.

ACTING OF “ANTIGONE” IN DUBLIN. Note p. 158.

I POSSESS a very delightful souvenir of my performances of *Antigone* in Dublin. It is a gold fibula presented by the heads of the University, the leading men of science, physicians, lawyers, painters, and literary men of that city; and it was accompanied by the following Address, to which their signatures, thirty-five in number, were attached:—

“TO MISS HELEN FAUCIT.

“MADAM,—We beg to give expression to the unalloyed and sustained satisfaction which we have derived from your late performances at our national theatre.

“We have each and all endeavoured to promote the cultivation of classic literature and the study of ancient art in this our city ; and we feel that your noble representation of Antigone has greatly advanced these important objects, by creating a love and admiration of the beauty and grandeur of ancient Greece.

“With the writings of the Grecian dramatists, it is true, we have long been familiar ; but their power and their beauty have come down to us through books alone. ‘Mute and motionless’ that drama has heretofore stood before us ; you, Madam, have given it voice, gesture, life ; you have realised the genius, and embodied the inspirations, of the authors and of the artists of early Greece ; and have thus encouraged and instructed the youth of Ireland in the study of their immortal works.

“We offer the accompanying testimonial to the virtues and talents of one, whose tastes, education, and surpassing powers have justly placed her at the summit of her profession.

“GEORGE PETRIE, V.P.R.I.A., *Chairman.*

JOHN ANSTER, LL.D., M.R.I.A.,
JOHN FRANCIS WALLER, M.R.I.A., } *Secretaries.*

“DUBLIN, 1845.”

The fibula, in itself an exquisite specimen of the goldsmith's art, was designed by Sir Frederic Burton.¹ Within an outer chaplet of olive-leaves, it presents the Cadmean serpent, which includes within its folds masks of Creon and Antigone, wrought in gold, and within the central coil, upon a white enamel ground, the figure of Antigone kneeling over a cinerary urn. Three large pear-shaped emeralds, skilfully disposed, relieve the chasing of the groundwork. The gold, I was told, was Irish ; the workmanship, like the design, Irish ; and nothing, I am sure, was wanting to satisfy the enthusiastic spirit of the donors, but that the emeralds should also have been native to the Emerald Isle. On the reverse side is the Theban shield, with the inscription—

ΕΛΕΝΗ
ΜΟΥΣΟΛΗΠΤΩ
ΤΗΣ ΑΝΤΙΓΟΝΗΣ
ΕΠΑΘΛΑ.

¹ It has now been deposited, by Lady Martin's desire, along with the Address, in the Dublin Museum.

"THE LADY OF LYONS," p. 165.

It would be difficult to overstate the enthusiasm which this play excited, when once it came to be known. As in all such cases, there was no lack of tributes from friends, unknown as well as known, to the actress, who had been the first to introduce the heroine to their notice. The only one of these which I seem to have preserved was from Mr Laman Blanchard, who, unknown to me, having borrowed my album from a friend, sent it back with the addition of the following lines :—

"TO HELEN FAUCIT.

(THE LADY OF LYONS.)

"What need I, oh Helen, comparisons draw
 'Twixt thee and the belles of Circassia and Cadiz ?
 Since first the sweet Lady of Lyons I saw,
 I swear I have deemed thee the Lion of Ladies.

Start not ! I would give thee no terrible shape—
 A lion—dove-voiced—like the poet's, I mean ;
 Though such are my chains, I might sooner escape
 From the leonine paw, than from you as Pauline.

Oh Lady of Lyons—what lions of his,
 Van Amburgh's, could move us like thee to applaud ?
 While he is avoiding a scratch on the phiz,
 We, seeing you, wish—yes, we wish to be Claude.

Yes, lady, the pride and the rapture of Claude,
 Though at first his love-garden was wofully weedy,
 In winning by faith what he'd captured by fraud,
 Oh, it does make one long to be Mr Macready !

Whilst hearing from *your* lips the truths he has written,
 Whilst watching the thoughts *your* deep eyes are revealing,
 I'm sure there must often steal over Sir Lytton
 A pleasant Pygmalionish sort of a feeling.

Oh Helen of Lyons ! Not she of old Troy,
 The Helen of Paris, is Helen to me,
 Nor Helen the brave-minded rib of Rob Roy,
 Nor Helen—Miss Edgeworth's—the best of the three !

Nor Shakespeare's fond Helen, who felt 'twas affliction
 To love, and not wed, some 'particular star';
 Though stars they may be, shining sweetly,—in fiction,—
 You glisten—in fact—more enchantingly far!

“LAMAN BLANCHARD.”

On another page of my album, not long afterwards, the author of *The Lady of Lyons* inscribed to me the following lines:—

“Thou canst not slight the wreath I lay before thee,
 Since thou hast given wreaths, not mine, to me;—
 Sweet Violet,¹ passionate Juliet, bright Pauline,
 Lending a Helen's shape to words of air,
 As Faustus called from air the shape of Helen:—
 So ever thus art has exchanged with art,
 Each still by each inspiring and inspired;
 As thou hast given thine own fair form and voice
 To many a dream by poet's heart conceived,
 So from that form and voice may poets yet
 Take dreams for future Helens to embody.

“E. L. B.”

LADY MACBETH, p. 233.

MANY friends have made requests to me to write of Lady Macbeth in a separate letter, treating her character with the same fulness of analysis and exposition which I have bestowed on the other heroines of Shakespeare included in this volume. It has reached me in many ways that the view I presented of Lady Macbeth in my impersonation of her has been welcomed by Shakespearian scholars of eminence, not only here but on the Continent, as having a special value in bringing back people's minds to a careful study of the character, and removing the mistaken impressions of it which had been produced by the genius of great actresses of a former period. Were I to yield to the wishes thus expressed, I could do little more than expand the brief suggestions which I have made in the text. From what is there said, it will be seen that such a critical examination of the play as would be required, in order to explain fully my conception of Lady Macbeth, would be a task of great labour, because it would not be prompted by

¹ The heroine of Lord Lytton's play of *The Sea Captain*.

the love for my subject which has made the writing about my favourite heroines comparatively easy. I am content to be judged by the recorded impressions produced by Lady Macbeth, as I acted her, upon the minds of men of high authority. The character I intended to portray has been so well described by the late William Carleton, the author of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, in a letter to my much-valued friend, the late Dr William Stokes of Dublin, that I trust I may be forgiven, if, notwithstanding the too warm eulogium upon myself, I quote it in further explanation of what I have said of Lady Macbeth in the text.

“2 CRESCENT, CLONTARF, *November 27, 1846.*

“MY DEAR DOCTOR,—When I saw you yesterday, I inadvertently proposed a task to myself during our conversation about Miss Faucit, which I now feel to be one of great difficulty, and, I may add, of humiliation. In accordance with my promise to you, I went last night and witnessed for the first time her performance of Lady Macbeth. I went, certainly, without any prejudices existing against her powers as an accomplished representative of those brilliant creations of female heroism and tenderness which have emanated from the imaginations of our great dramatists, but, in this particular instance, with a very different theory upon the subject of that histrionic impersonation which I have hitherto conceived best calculated to portray those elements which constitute the character of Lady Macbeth. You, from our conversation of yesterday, understand what I mean. In plain terms, I thought Miss Faucit’s reading of Lady Macbeth’s character, as detailed by you, and as I had heard before, at variance with the terrible inhumanities which are bodied forth in it. . . .

“Be this as it may, I promised to give you a true account of the impression which her delineation of the character might make upon me, and I proceed now to keep my word as well as I can, premising that I fear I may still be too much under the influence of the impressions she produced, to take what I say as the result of cool and purely judicial opinion. It is not an easy thing to call in philosophy to our aid when we are glowing with the emotions of enthusiasm and natural partiality, which the genius of such a woman is certain to excite. Philosophy is a very good old fellow in his way, but I have always found that whenever I stood most in need of his guardianship and aid,—whenever my feelings or my heart were likely to run away with my judgment, the faithless old villain has uniformly neglected his post and abandoned me. But seriously, whether Miss Faucit’s conception of the character be right or wrong, she has, so far as I am concerned, most signally triumphed by the impression which I carried home from her impersonation of it. I know it has been said that the

heart does not reason ; but although this may be true in a general sense, I am conscious that there is in the operation or exercise of our feelings some nameless principle of truth which instinctively teaches us what is right, and upon which it is a thousand times safer to rely than upon the cooler codes of conventional opinion, by which we are too often unwittingly influenced. After all, this is no more than Nature simply recognising herself in the human heart through the medium of her own sympathies.

“The first thing that began gradually to creep upon me last night was an unaccountable yet irresistible sense of propriety in Miss Faucit’s management of the character. This argued, you will tell me, neither more nor less than the force of truth. Perhaps it is so ; but, be it what it may, it soon gained upon me so powerfully, that I began to feel as if I had never seen Lady Macbeth’s true character before. I said to myself : this woman, it seems to me, is simply urging her husband forward through her love for him, which prompts her to wish for the gratification of his ambition, to commit a murder. This, it would appear, is her sole object, and in working it out, she is naturally pursuing a terrible course, and one of singular difficulty. She perceives that he has scruples ; and it is necessary that she should work upon him so far as that he should commit the crime, but at the same time prevent him from feeling revolted at the contemplation of it ; and this she effects by a sanguinary sophistry that altogether hardens his heart. But this closes her lessons of cruelty to him. In such a case it is not necessary that she should label herself as a murderess, and wantonly parade that inhuman ferocity by which she has hitherto been distinguished. Her office of temptress ceases with the murder, and the gratification of what she had considered her husband’s ambition. This, as I felt it, is the distinction which Miss Faucit draws,—the great discovery she has made. It unquestionably adds new elements to the character, and not only rescues it from the terrible and revolting monotony in which it has heretofore appeared, but keeps it within the category of humanity, and gives a beautiful and significant moral to the closing scenes of the queen’s life.

“Indeed the character from this forward is represented by Miss Faucit with wonderful discrimination and truth. I felt this strongly, for I had never before observed the harmony between her acting and the language of Shakespeare. In this, however, I have only laboured, with the public, under the disadvantage of being misled by the authority of Mrs Siddons as to the true estimate of Lady Macbeth’s character ; and I do not know a greater triumph than that achieved by the fair and great reformer of bringing us back to Shakespeare and to truth.

"In another point of view, it appears to me that Miss Faucit stands alone, proving that she possesses the grand and original simplicity which belongs to true genius. She has dared to cast aside all the antiquated forms of the stage—all those traditionary appendages to character, which in acting were common property, and are still too much so. It is evident that all her motions on the stage result, naturally and without effort, from such a full and glowing conception of the character as occasions, without any such traditionary memories, the spontaneous and appropriate action only. It naturally follows, therefore, that she never moves nor looks upon the stage without conveying some truth or sentiment, or expressing some passion.

"This faculty is almost peculiar to herself. For instance, in following her husband after the supper scene: simple and without significance as this act has been in others, she exhibited in it an astonishing manifestation of genius, for in that act all might read the awful agonies that were at work in her heart. Her conduct in this scene was different from anything I have witnessed before. In others there was displayed the predominant passion or passions, now without a motive—namely, a hardened and bloodthirsty ferocity, mingled with a wish to conceal her husband's crime. In Miss Faucit's acting, there was visible the latter motive, which was indeed natural, together with the ill-suppressed anguish of a gentle spirit, and a perceptible struggle to subdue the manifestations of that guilt, whilst attempting to encourage and sustain her husband. All this I felt again to be the triumph of Shakespeare and of truth, and, let me add, of Helen Faucit.

"In the sleep-walking scene she crowned the performance of the night. To witness it is worth a thousand homilies against murder. There is in it such a frightful reality of horror—such terrible revelations of remorse—such struggles to wash away, not the blood from the hand, but the blood from the soul, as made me shudder from head to foot, and the very hair to stand upon my head. How the deadly agonies of crime were portrayed by the parched mouth, that told of the burning tortures within! And when you looked on those eyes, or those corpse-like hands, now telling their unconscious tale of crime, and thought of their previous energy in urging on its perpetration, you could not help looking fearfully for a moment into your own heart, and thanking God you were free from the remorse of murder. This scene is, indeed, beyond criticism—it is above it."

NOTE TO LETTER ON ROSALIND, p. 234.

I AM happy to learn from my valued friend, M. Regnier, that I was right in thinking the Parisian actors had neither the desire nor the power to stop the English performances at the Salle Ventadour. He writes (15th October 1884) to Sir Theodore Martin—"Je ne veux pas laisser un doute dans l'esprit de Lady Martin sur ce fait, que les acteurs parisiens auraient en 1845 fait appel aux autorités 'to prevent the prolongation of the English performances.' Le fait est impossible. Les autorités auraient envoyé promener les acteurs malavisés qui auraient fait une telle demande; les autorités n'avaient aucun droit pour y satisfaire, et tous les comédiens français dont je faisais partie alors, suivaient avec trop de curiosité les représentations anglaises pour désirer qu'on les discontinuât."

May I be forgiven if I quote with natural pride the opinion of one whose words carry so much weight, from a letter of M. Regnier's to the same correspondent about my performances in Paris:—

"Je n'ai jamais revu ou relu *Othello* ou *Hamlet* sans me rappeler ce que Lady Martin fût dans *Desdemona* et dans *Ophelia*; et toujours j'ai conservé dans mon esprit, comme un de mes plus frappants souvenirs dramatiques, la représentation où, pour la première fois (à Paris du moins), elle joua le rôle de Lady Macbeth. Elle sût y montrer une autorité, une maturité de talent, qui cadrerait peu avec ses jeunes années, et je fus heureux alors, comme il me semble qu'elle en dût être flattée, de lui voir recueillir des éloges si justes et si éclatants, tant de la part du public qui sent, que de la part du public qui juge."¹

The warmth with which the Paris public received me, and to which allusion has been made more than once in the text, was the more gratifying, that I had come among them as a complete stranger, with no preliminary intimation of the position which I had held since my first appearance upon the English stage. Of the numerous criticisms which appeared in the journals at the time, none gave me greater satisfaction and encouragement than a paper by M. Edouard Thierry, afterwards for many years the Director of the Comédie Française, in the *Messenger* of 20th January 1845. That my estimate of its value was well grounded has been confirmed by M. Regnier in a recent letter (2 March 1885). "Parmi les éloges," he writes, "que la Presse française a faits de vous, vous devez faire un cas particulier de ceux de M.

¹ I learn to-day (29th April 1885), with great regret, the death of this fine artist and accomplished and amiable gentleman.

Ed. Thierry, qui est compté dans notre littérature comme un critique de premier ordre, d'un jugement très sur, et d'un goût difficile ; sa louange n'a jamais été banale, et est d'un grand prix."

As a specimen of what dramatic criticism in Paris used to be, and of the spirit and knowledge which made it precious to artists, as it was instructive to the public, the following extracts may not be uninteresting :—

" Lorsque l'on annonça les représentations des artistes anglais sur la scène au Théâtre Italien, nous ne connaissions ici que deux noms de la troupe nouvelle, celui de Macready, celui de Bennett ; car on se rappelait aussi avoir vu M. Bennett durant le premier séjour que firent à Paris les acteurs venus de Londres. Quant à Miss Helen Faucit, le bruit de son talent n'avait jamais été assez loin pour passer le détroit, et lorsque la troupe débuta par *Othello*, dès premières scènes de l'ouvrage, à voir manœuvrer l'entourage du célèbre comédien, on pensa, c'était presque raison, qu'il serait seul l'intérêt et la curiosité du nouveau théâtre ; je n'ai pas besoin d'ajouter, après Shakespeare.

" Miss Helen, en effet, n'a pas ces dehors, ces enseignes, si l'on veut, de l'actrice, que attirent dès l'abord les regards du spectateur, préparent sa bienveillance, et quelque chose de plus que sa bienveillance, lui font désirer enfin de trouver le talent où ils aiment la beauté. Miss Helen, pour qui la voit en passant, est une jeune femme de formes grêles, mais non pas délicates, grande, et à laquelle manque la fleur de la chair.¹ Cependant, aussitôt qu'elle marche, aussitôt qu'elle fait un geste, qu'elle prend une attitude, une grâce charmante se révèle. Cette jeune femme, qui ne semblait pas avoir la séduction nécessaire de l'actrice, a tout l'attrait mais l'attrait irrésistible de la femme. Elle est femme, en un mot ; sa grâce particulière ne saurait s'expliquer par aucune autre expression ; et quand elle parle, c'est encore la voix qui convient à cette grâce, c'est la douceur d'organe qui sied bien à cette harmonie de la démarche et de toute la personne, c'est le son caressant qui accompagne à souhait cette caresse, pour ainsi parler, du regard et des manières décentes.

" Aussi, avant la fin de la soirée, le public partageait déjà son attention entre *Othello* et *Desdemona*. Il savait que Londres lui avait envoyé plus qu'un grand tragédien, qu'il avait envoyé aussi une grande tragédienne.

¹ An unintended compliment. It surprised a French critic to see an actress trust mainly to her natural complexion. The abuse of cosmetics on the French stage, which was then habitual, has since been carried, in many instances, to an excess upon our own. When the skin is covered with what is in effect a painted mask, the natural colour, which under strong emotion would come and go, is hidden under it, and the expression of the countenance destroyed.

“Ce n'est pas là un succès de surprise. Rien n'avait pu prévenir les esprits. La petite industrie de la réclame n'avait pas répandu à propos l'éloge officieux, aucune anecdote n'avait été inventée, pas la moindre historiette mise en circulation, pas le moindre commencement de biographie. L'affiche même, si fleurie en épithètes et en aménités oratoires, n'avait pas ajouté au nom de Miss Helen Faucit la plus simple de ses insinuations, et la *caractère* avait été scrupuleusement mesuré de manière à ce que la seconde *vedette* n'affectât pas la prétention de rivaliser avec la première ; mais le talent véritable n'a pas besoin de ces habilités d'éditeur ou de directeur de spectacle : inconnue avant la représentation, Miss Faucit ne l'était plus dès le quatrième acte. Après le cinquième, elle fut rappelée avec Macready. . . . Miss Faucit devenait comme une de nos actrices, comme une actrice française.

“Il est vrai que son talent avait déjà pour nous quelque chose de moins étranger et de plus ami. Il était nouveau, et pourtant nous lui trouvions je ne sais quelle ressemblance avec nos souvenirs. Cette grâce si fine, si spirituelle et si naïve, c'était de la grâce anglaise assurément, c'était aussi de la grâce allemande. Mais où avons nous vu cette grâce allemande ? Nous l'avions vue sur la scène de l'Opéra, nous l'avions vue dans nos ballets, dans la *Gipsy*, dans le *Diable Boiteux*, dans la *Tarentule* ; elle s'appelait alors Fanny Elsler, et qu'y a-t-il d'étonnant que nous ayons aimé Miss Faucit, que nous l'ayons reconnue, que le public français l'ait adoptée pour cette ressemblance ?

“Ajoutez une voix comme celle de Mlle. Mars, et une manière de réciter qui se rapproche surtout de notre manière. En général, les artistes anglais ont retenu l'emphase de la tragédie, telle que la jouait Lafont, telle qu'on la déclamaient à côté de Talma. Macready lui-même a conservé par momens ce débit pompeux, qu'il accentue d'ailleurs à la façon anglaise en appuyant sur toutes les syllabes. Miss Helen Faucit parle simplement, naturellement ; la phrase coule limpide de ses lèvres, et s'échappe d'une seule émission, comme dans notre récitation française. . . .

“Après *Othello*, sont venus successivement *Hamlet*, *Virginus*, *Macbeth*, *Roméo* et *Juliette*. À chacun de ces drames, le succès de Miss Faucit s'est accru sans autres artifices. L'actrice jouait, et le public applaudissait.”

OPHELIA.

“On n'avait imaginé Ophelia ni plus touchante, ni plus gracieuse. Notre parterre français est demeuré surpris devant cette pantomime pleine de sens, pleine d'idées, pleine de bonté, pleine de tendresses,

pleine de passion même, mais surtout pleine de mesure et pleine de modestie. Car c'est là une qualité rare ; aussi je reviens sur cet éloge ; il y a dans Miss Faucit, et à un degré eminent, ce que j'appelle la modestie de l'artiste, ce désintéressement précieux par lequel l'artiste préfère l'art à lui-même, et le succès du drame à son propre succès. Quel que soit le rôle, quelle que soit la scène, Miss Faucit prend sa place dans la perspective du tableau, dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre, et cette place elle la garde jusqu'à la fin, sans chercher à sortir de la demi-teinte nécessaire ; disparaissant même au besoin dans l'ombre que le poète a ménagée."

VIRGINIA.

"Dans *Virginius* le rôle de Virginie n'est pour ainsi dire que le fond obligé du drame. Toute l'action repose sur ce rôle, mais en y pesant de son poids et en l'écrasant. Le drame ne saurait être qu'à cette condition. Timide, élevée dans le secret du foyer domestique, Virginie aime Icilius, et son amour est celui d'une jeune fille, un amour qui se trahit, sans parler, qui se décèle en se cachant. Lorsque le client d'Appius entraîne Virginie sur le Forum, Virginie se couvre de son voile, et le peuple dispute au Décemvir une victime sans défense. Lorsque Virginius à son tour revient de l'armée en tout hâte, se présente au tribunal d'Appius, et reconnaît avec désespoir que sa fille n'est déjà plus à lui, lorsqu'il en appelle au peuple, lorsqu'il prend les dieux à témoin, lorsque de la prière il passe à la menace, lorsqu'il rugit comme un lion blessé, lorsqu' enfin il se jette sur le couteau qui fera de la fille une morte, et de cette morte une vierge inviolée, Virginie n'appartient déjà plus à la vie, ses forces l'ont abandonnée ; elle ne voit rien, n'entend rien, ne se soutient qu'en s'appuyant sur la poitrine de son père, et lorsque ce malheureux père oublie un moment sa fille pour se détourner vers le peuple ou le Décemvir, Virginie se laisse aller à terre, et se rattache à peine au bord du manteau paternel.

"C'est là un de ces rôles que nos artistes n'accepteraient pas volontiers. Ecrit, il contient à peine soixante lignes. Joué, il assiste à la durée des quatre premiers actes, pour disparaître au cinquième, et lorsqu'il est présent à l'action, il n'y sert encore qu'à fournir aux autres rôles leurs effets dramatiques. Miss Faucit le remplit avec ce dévouement dont je parlais tout à l'heure ; elle s'abandonne au talent de Macready, comme si ce talent était sa propre gloire. Macready est l'âme de ce corps qui n'a plus d'autre volonté que la volonté du tragédien, d'autres intentions que ses intentions, d'autre ambition que la faiblesse, que la passivité, que l'inertie. Faiblesse, passivité, inertie intelligente toutefois, car l'actrice trouve dans cette sorte d'abnégation

d'elle-même un de ses plus légitimes triomphes, et le public sait bien l'applaudir en voyant Virginie si douce, si malheureuse, si digne de pitié."

LADY MACBETH.

"Entre Virginie et Lady Macbeth il y a toute la gamme de l'art à parcourir. Ce sont là deux figures si diverses, qu'une même nature ne semble pas devoir suffire à représenter l'une et l'autre ; mais le sentiment du vrai supplée dans un artiste à bien des conditions physiques, et Miss Faucit, dans la scène du sommeil, s'est élevée jusqu'aux effets les plus saisissants de la terreur. On se rappellera toujours le geste impatient et inquiet avec lequel Lady Macbeth appelle son mari absent, et se retire elle-même en lui disant, 'Au lit ! au lit !'"

JULIET.

"Mais enfin nous avons vu le rôle de Juliette, et comment avons-nous vu ? Comment nous a-t-il été donné ? À coup sûr la direction de la troupe anglaise n'avait pas songé dès l'abord à garder un fragment de Shakespeare, et Miss Faucit seule, dans ce fragment du poète, pour sa représentation d'adieux. C'est le succès qui a valu cet honneur à la tragédienne, et à nous la bonne fortune d'une semblable soirée. Je regrette profondément que *Roméo de Juliette* ne soit pas joué une seconde fois. . . . Il n'est pas possible que M. Mitchell n'essaie pas de nouveau une représentation qui a si vivement ému toute la Salle. . . ."

After describing the entrance of Romeo in the balcony scene, and the first words of Juliet's reverie, M. Edouard Thierry continues :—

"C'est le malheur de nos tragédiennes que toute nôtre théâtre ne contienne pas une scène de ce charme et de cette poésie. Est-ce la Conservatoire ? Est-ce Corneille ? Est-ce Racine lui-même qui leur apprendrait à jouer de telles choses ? Plus heureuse, par là du moins, Miss Faucit a trouvé dans le poète classique de l'Angleterre des situations comme le cœur les rêve, où la grande science de l'acteur est de savoir sentir et de savoir aimer. Miss Faucit a-t-elle jamais reçu d'autres leçons ? Elle est femme ; je ne suppose pas que Shakespeare ait demandé autre chose à sa Juliette.

"Quel maître, si ce n'est le cœur, enseignera le bonheur de confier le secret d'un premier amour à la nuit silencieuse, et ces élans où l'âme se sent assez grande pour remplir l'espace infini, et cette pudeur d'amante de qui l'amant inaperçu a surpris la délicieuse confidence, et cette rougeur voilée par l'ombre, et cette honte qui n'est ni de la honte

ni même du regret, et ce regret, s'il en est un, qui ne sait lui-même s'il ne s'appelle pas du bonheur, et cette félicité de deux âmes qui échangent le serment d'amour, et cette promptitude d'enfant à donner toutes ses pensées, toute sa vie, et ce désir d'enfant qui veut les reprendre, et ces naïvetés d'enfant qui se hâtent de rendre plus encore qu'on n'a repris, plus qu'on n'avait donné ; et ces adieux sans fin, et ce courage nouveau qui se sent plus fort que la mort, mais non pas que la séparation et que l'absence ? . . . Oui, il y a tout cela dans cette scène de Shakespeare, qui est presque un poème, et il n'y a rien de moins dans le jeu de Miss Helen Faucit. On écoutait et on admirait. En ce moment tout le monde comprenait Shakespeare, comme tout le monde comprend l'amour. Et puis, c'est un des caractères du talent de Miss Faucit, sa physionomie explique tout, raconte tout, apprend tout ; c'est un livre ouvert, un livre merveilleux, si vous voulez, ou chacun peut lire dans sa langue. J'en appelle aux souvenirs de ceux qui assistaient à la représentation de *Roméo*, aux souvenirs de notre public qui ne sait pas l'anglais : Est-il un seul mot de cet admirable dialogue, un seul mot de ce charmant aveu de Juliette, qui n'ait été entendu, comme s'il eût été dit dans une langue universelle, au sortir des lèvres de Miss Helen ?

“Il en a été de même de la scène entre Juliette et sa nourrice, lorsque la bonne vieille revient lui rendre la réponse de Roméo, et que, soit malice, soit faiblesse de l'âge, l'un et l'autre peut-être, elle ne veut pas cesser de se plaindre et de s'interrompre, en se récriant sur sa fatigue, sur ses douleurs de tête, sur ses douleurs de reins. Je le répète, notre théâtre ne nous habitue pas à ces ingénuités charmantes ; à ces bouderies, à ces impatiences, à ces câlineries ; et le public battait les mains à voir Miss Faucit appuyer si doucement sa joue contre la joue de sa nourrice, se mettre à genoux auprès d'elle, lui prendre le menton dans ses deux mains, la plaindre avec sa gentillesse enfantine, la bercer sur son fauteuil, la cajoler, la flatter, la dorloter, impatiente cependant, et avide d'entendre parler de Roméo, mais patiente à force d'impatience et de désir.

“Miss Faucit a encore eu une scène admirable, celle-ci d'un autre genre, la scène tragique où elle prend le breuvage qui doit lui donner les apparences de la mort. Ainsi composée, une scène se développe comme un drame complet. Rien n'y est omis. À partir du moment où la Signora Capulet se retire, et où sa fille lui baise la main à genoux, avec la tendresse passionnée d'un dernier adieu, Juliette passe par tous les degrés de la terreur ! Elle est seule, elle s'effraie de la solitude, et elle songe à rappeler sa nourrice, puis elle essaie à se rassurer elle-même et à sourire à son effroi. Elle s'excite au courage par l'aversion qu'elle éprouve pour le Comte, et, si le breuvage ne produit pas son effet, elle se dit, qu'elle a toujours un poignard pour

se soustraire à la contrainte. Si pourtant ce breuvage était réellement un poison ? . . . Crainte singulière de la mort par le poison, pour une femme qui vient de regarder son poignard comme une consolation et comme une force. Crainte naturelle toutefois, car le poignard c'est la mort volontaire, le poison c'est la mort involontaire, et la mort mystérieuse, inconnue.

“Après un moment de rêverie, tous ces secrets de la mort viennent épouvanter la jeune fille. Placée vivante dans le tombeau, elle s'y réveillera ; mais que Roméo tarde à venir, et l'air doit manquer sous les voûtes de ces caveaux funèbres. Et la poussière des trépassés que l'on respire comme la cendre, et les ombres de ceux qui ne sont plus qui voltigent sans cesse dans les ténèbres, et Tybalt frappé par Roméo, Tybalt sanglant, mort de la veille, que ne manquera pas de se réunir à cette assemblée invisible de spectres séculaires ! . . . À ce moment Miss Faucit a été réellement sublime. Le public partageait son épouvante, et cette épouvante s'est prolongée jusqu'à la fin du monologue, tant l'actrice a su varier, par sa pantomime, par l'expression de ses traits, ces tableaux, cette suite d'horribles et étranges visions.

“Après cette scène, le dernier acte ne pouvait plus rien ajouter à l'emotion du spectateur. . . . Miss Faucit a évité les éclats trop violens, et de la joie de Juliette en revoyant Roméo, et de son désespoir en le revoyant avec la mort dans ses yeux. Elle a conservé jusqu'à la fin l'étonnement vague de la léthargie. Peut-être, en effet, y a-t-il là un sentiment plus vrai de la situation ; mais au théâtre il faut que les effets s'ajoutent les uns aux autres dans une progression mathématique, et le cinquième acte doit frapper le spectateur d'une impression plus vive que le quatrième.

“Quoi qu'il en soit, Miss Faucit a été rappelée par d'unanimes acclamations, et, quand elle a reparu, les bouquets pleuvaient à ses pieds.”

THE END.

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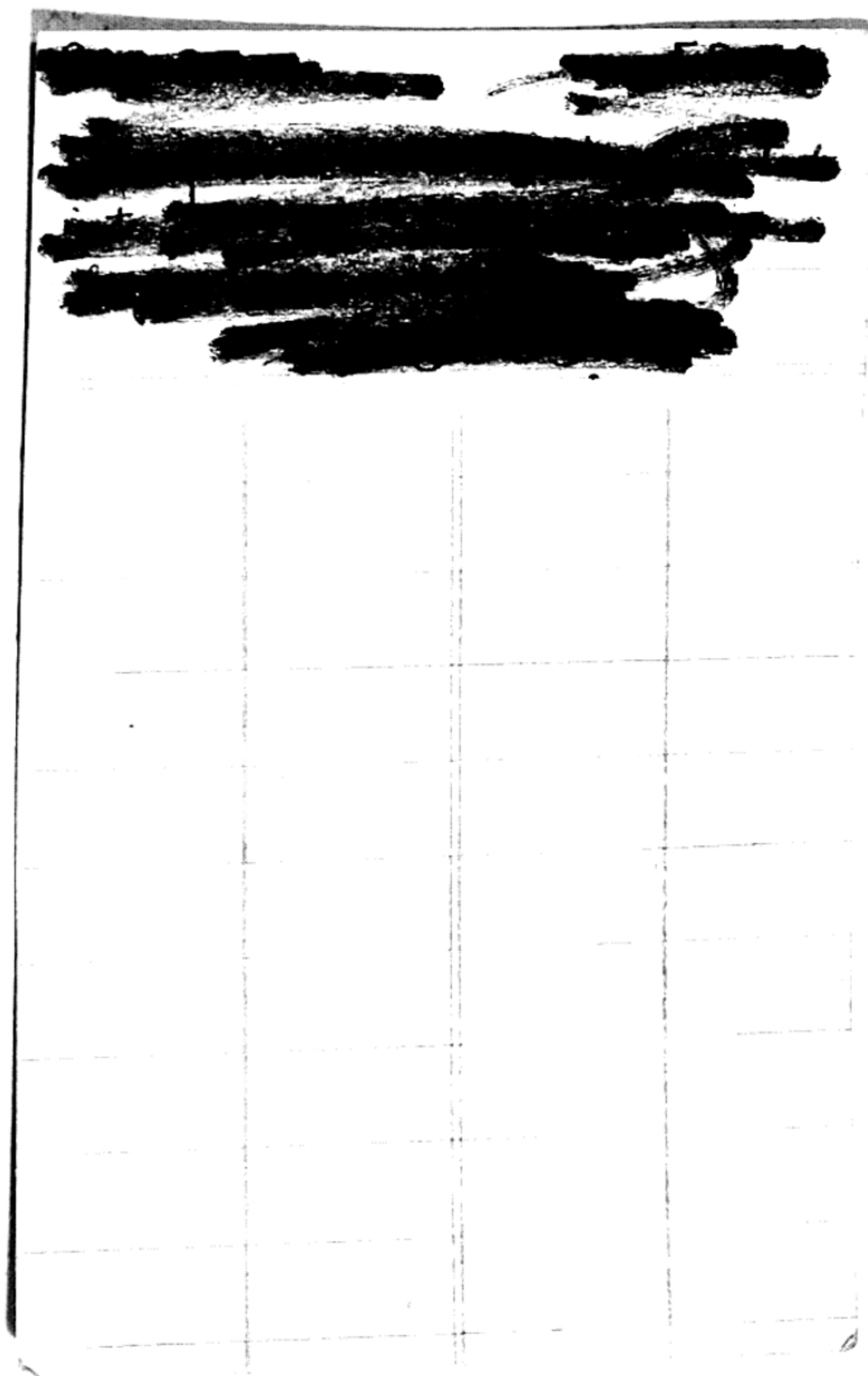
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